Fantastic Four

MARVEL SPOTLIGHT

FEATURING THE SILVER SURFER

MEET THE ALL-NEW, ALL-DIFFERENT FF!

STAN LEE AND ALAN DAVIS TALK ABOUT *FF: THE END!*

PREVIEW ART FROM *SILVER SURFER: REQUIEM!*

INSIDE JACK KIRBY'S GALACTUS TRILOGY WITH ERIK LARSEN!

RATED T+

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MARVEL

PLUGGING IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Fantastic Four and the Silver Surfer are both on the rise in this month's 48-page issue of *Marvel Spotlight*, so join us for an expansive look at two of Marvel's hottest properties!

I: The All-New, All-Different Fantastic Four!

Spotlight welcomes Black Panther and Storm to the First Family with new FF creators Dwayne McDuffie and Paul Pelletier!

II: The Masterworks: A Gallery of the Greatest Fantastic Four Art

Jack Kirby drew some of the most important comics pages of all time in the Galactus Trilogy *(FF #48-50)*. Comic artist Erik Larsen is on hand to take a look at this classic tale and share with us the magnificence of the art of Jack "King" Kirby!

III: From Thor To Four: A Look Back at Walt Simonson's FF!

Taking a look at Walt Simonson's early '90s run on Fantastic Four, which is being reprinted in *Fantastic Four Visionaries: Walt Simonson Vol. 1 TPB!*

IV: Top Thing Stories of All Time!

Counting 'em down, Ben Grimm gets his due as one of the most prolific and popular characters in the Marvel lexicon! These are the BEST stories around starring Aunt Petunia's most handsome nephew!

V: The Art of the Silver Surfer: Esad Ribic

Feast your eyes on some gorgeous preview pages of renowned painter Esad Ribic's work from the upcoming J. Michael Straczynski opus, *Silver Surfer: Requiem!*

VI: The End According to Alan Davis and Stan Lee

Two different *FF: The End* stories, two different creators… and *Spotlight* talks to both of them! Both writer/artist Alan Davis and comics legend Stan Lee are on hand to take a look at their respective stories!

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THE ALL-NEW, ALL-DIFFERENT FANTASTIC FOUR

BY DUGAN TRODGLEN

With Black Panther and Storm drafted to lead the team lineup, writer Dwayne McDuffie and artist Paul Pelletier will be taking the new FF into uncharted territory!

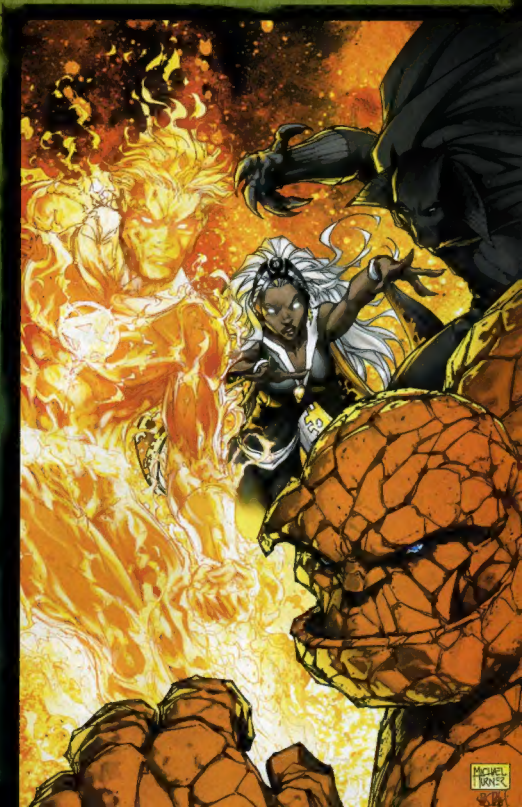
Dwayne McDuffie is a veteran of over 25 years in the comic book business. Getting his start with the fan-favorite series *Damage Control*, he recently returned to the House of Ideas with the limited series, *Beyond!* Now he has taken the reigns of the post-Civil War *Fantastic Four*, complete with a revamped lineup which features Black Panther and Storm replacing Reed and Sue Richards at the helm of the team. *Marvel Spotlight* spoke to Dwayne about his thoughts on the new First Family and what to expect as he guides them through their all-new adventures.

SPOTLIGHT: Dwayne, what are your earliest memories of the Fantastic Four?

DWAYNE: I can't remember if I saw the cartoon before I saw the comic. I do remember that I used to buy *Fantastic Four* comics and *Marvel's Greatest Comics*, which reprinted older Stan Lee/Jack Kirby *Fantastic Four* issues. I understood so little about comic books, that I didn't understand that *Marvel's Greatest* was a reprint, I just thought it was "the good one." The other one was okay, but *Marvel's Greatest* was reprinting the Kirby stuff. I have very fond memories of buying those books. I didn't understand what a monthly was; I didn't understand how they came out. Every once in a while they'd come out and I'd get them.

SPOTLIGHT: So you definitely recognized the Kirby stuff as the best.

DWAYNE: Yeah. I didn't pay attention to who wrote or drew it; the Kirby issues just looked cool and the stories were better.



WORLD'S GREATEST PRESS CONFERENCE: The new FF lineup is unveiled to a curious public. (Image from *FF #544.*)

SPOTLIGHT: Did you have a favorite FF member?

DWAYNE: Oh, The Thing. The Thing is one of my all-time favorite characters in any medium. He's just a beautifully constructed character. The pathos; the visual is wonderful; and just the warmth and humanity. I just love The Thing.

SPOTLIGHT: How has that translated to your approach to the character as a writer?

DWAYNE: You know – I love writing him. I used to sneak him in all the time when I was writing other titles. I'd always find a way to get him in there! Actually, what I'm finding in my first story arc for *Fantastic Four*, he doesn't get to do much, which I'm going to fix really soon. Because of the needs of that particular plot, he was just sort of in the background for that one, but he'll come to the foreground before I'm done.

SPOTLIGHT: Let's talk about the characters as members of the group, starting with Ben. How do you view his role in the *Fantastic Four*?

DWAYNE: He's the emotional heart of the team. He's feelings – how we feel about stuff, not how we think about stuff. He's morally very direct, but just because he presents his ideas very simply and clearly doesn't mean that he doesn't have complex ideas. I like that about him a lot.

SPOTLIGHT: Reed and Sue are not currently members of the team, but certainly are a part of the family, and will continue to appear in the book. Give us your thoughts on Mr. Fantastic.

DWAYNE: I think my take on Reed is little different than the recent take in the comics. He is a man of ideas, but he is also a man of compassion. He wants to learn, and that's his driving force – he wants to go places, see things, figure out how they work, and then go see some more stuff. On the other hand, while he's investigating stuff, when he sees people being wronged, he immediately jumps in to fix it. He doesn't spend a lot of time thinking about whether it's right or not to fix this problem. He fixes the problem.

SPOTLIGHT: How about Sue Richards, The Invisible Woman?

DWAYNE: It's weird, because Sue gets kind of played as the mom of the group. She's sort of a buffer between the other strong personalities. On the other hand, there's sort of this sacrificial "I'm going to step back and allow the group to do what the group needs to do." I'm showing my age here, but she's [hockey great] John Havlicek. She's the player that makes the team better. She doesn't put the big numbers up herself. She could. She's easily the most powerful member of the group. But she does what the team needs to succeed, both in battle and emotionally. This is why the stuff that's happening post-Civil War is so terrifying.

SURFER MEETS STORM: Paul Pelletier's black and white pencil art from page 8 of *Fantastic Four #545*

Without her there, without her support, it's really difficult to conceive of the team.

SPOTLIGHT: That sounds like a great theme. And Sue's brother Johnny, The Human Torch?

DWAYNE: Initially he was going into it, both the original mission and into the FF as a group, because his big sister was there, and he worships her and wants to take care of her. Over the course of doing good for many years now, he's come to enjoy doing good. He also sees Reed as a father figure and wants Reed's approval a great deal. And to Johnny, Ben is the big brother who nobody can pick on but me. It's a really nice family dynamic there.

SPOTLIGHT: Indeed. How does Johnny deal with Reed's absence, as someone who craves his approval?

DWAYNE: It's not even as much him not being there as seeing that your "dad" is human. Johnny is going through that thing when you're an adolescent and you realize that your father's just a man. He's not the strongest; he's not perfect. He's a good guy, but he's just a guy. That's a lot for the Torch to swallow.

SPOTLIGHT: Moving onto the new members. How do you view Black Panther as both a character and a member of the team?

DWAYNE: I love the Panther. The idea of a man that accomplished and powerful in any sort of circumstances is impressive. He's a guy prepared for any situation, a guy who will take the pain and do what needs to be done in order to achieve his goals; to the edge of ruthlessness. If he has to saw his leg off to get out of a trap, he'll do it. He'll saw yours off too if that's what it takes. He probably has four or five other ways to get you out of the trap, but if that's what it takes, he'll do it.

SPOTLIGHT: It seems like the Panther always make you think it's going to take the saw, and at the last minute comes up with an ace up his sleeve.

DWAYNE: We certainly hope so. Especially if it's my leg!

SPOTLIGHT: Finally, we have T'Challa's bride, Storm.

DWAYNE: She is an excellent counter-balance to him. Panther is fiercely ethical, and Storm is fiercely moral. The Panther has a set of rules for himself and operates within that ethical system. Storm has morals that can outweigh her own best interests, making it harder for her to do certain things than it is for Panther. She's a good balance for him, and she'll draw lines that he won't cross. Because of his respect for her, there are things he would do if she were not there, but won't do because she is there.

SPOTLIGHT: Do you think that's one of the reasons he's with her – that he appreciates having that balance?

DWAYNE: I think so. He plans things way too well to not have understood ahead of time what affect having her there would have on him. He's not surprised.

SPOTLIGHT: What is the Fantastic Four's status quo as of your run?

DWAYNE: During Civil War, pretty much the entire team disagreed with Reed's decision to support the Superhuman Registration Act. Reed had what he thought were very good reasons for doing it, that came out of his absolute faith in science and rationality. But again, there's also compassion at work. Reed is being a little like the Panther here – Reed thinks we have to saw off that leg, there's no other way. Sue strongly disagrees with him. Sue says, "Our business is winning when there's no way to win. We've been doing it since we started. We find a way, and we'll find a way this time. You're wrong." I think she was crushed that Reed didn't pull a device out of his pocket and stop it. That's sort of what she was expecting, because that's what he always does. He couldn't do it. On the other hand, Reed is playing a long game. What he did in Civil War is not the end of his plan. We're starting to hint at that a little bit. Johnny, as I said before, was crushed to see his hero have feet of clay, and Ben was caught in the middle of his loyalty to his country and his loyalty to his friend, Reed. He actually did something that I thought was quite cowardly for him. He said, "I'm not going to make a decision. I'm not going to get involved; I'm going to France." Eventually he makes a decision to come back and that his job is to help people. Let the government stuff sort itself out, but he'll help the people, which I think is right and appropriate for the Thing.

> "REED IS PLAYING A LONG GAME. WHAT HE DID IN CIVIL WAR IS NOT THE END OF HIS PLAN."
>
> — WRITER DWAYNE MCDUFFIE

Post-Civil War, Sue and Reed reconcile somewhat. Sue comes back to Reed, but clearly it's going to be a different relationship. She's seen a side of him she would never have to see if this situation hadn't come up, and that's changed her view of him.

MICHAEL TURNER: One of comics' hottest artists turns in a scorching hot cover for *Fantastic Four #547!*

She still loves him, and obviously he loves her, because he can't function without her, which he acknowledges. The two of them have decided to try and reconcile. Reed has taken her to Saturn's moon Titan for a second honeymoon and to try to work these things out. Then they'll decide whether or not the FF is part of their future relationship.

What we have is Ben and Johnny holding down the fort, and coincidentally the Wakandan embassy gets destroyed and Reed allows Black Panther ad Storm to use the Baxter Building as a temporary embassy. Panther wants to stay in New York because of the U.N. He has deep concerns about the U.S. militarizing super heroes and is here trying to gain support in the world community against that. Of course, because they are living in the Baxter Building, when stuff comes up, of course Storm will jump right in, and a lot of times, that means he'll have to go along too.

SPOTLIGHT: And what kind of "stuff" is going to "come up"?

DWAYNE: The first thing is the mystery of what happened to Gravity's body. Gravity died at the end of the Beyond! series [A series Dwayne wrote that gets *Spotlight's* highest recommendation! — Ed.]. They're going to try to find who stole his body, which is going to send them on a mission halfway across the

"TO ME, THE FF'S ALWAYS BEEN ABOUT GOING PLACES AND KICKING BUTT, AND (BECAUSE OF CIVIL WAR) THEY HAVEN'T HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO DO THAT."

— McDUFFIE

SURFER RETURNS: The Surfer returns to the pages of the *FF* in this gorgeous splash page by new artist Paul Pelletier. *(From FF #544.)*

galaxy, with stops at the Watcher's "house" and the library where the Watchers store all of the information they've gathered. Then they run into Epoch and the Silver Surfer, and we know who's right behind the Surfer.

SPOTLIGHT: That sounds pretty action packed.

DWAYNE: Yeah, that's another thing. Because Civil War was such a moral conflict, and because so much of it was set around the Negative Zone entrance, which is in the Baxter Building, the *FF*'s been sitting around the house too much for my taste lately. They had to be around because of the storyline, but to me the FF's always been about going places and kicking butt, and they haven't had an opportunity to do that. The first thing I want to do is take them on a deep space mission, and even Reed and Sue, instead of going to Hawaii, go to Titan for their second honeymoon. We want to get the explorer aspect back.

SPOTLIGHT: That sounds like a perfect approach. Let's look back at your earlier days. How did you get your start in comics?

DWAYNE: I was working at a financial magazine and I hated it. It was actually a really good job, a well-paying job that I despised. I was having dinner with Gregg Wright, a friend of mine who was working at Marvel. He said, "Hey, they're looking for an assistant editor. You should call 'em up." So I was interviewed and hired. The major thing was that I took such a big pay cut to work at Marvel (or at least to get away from the other job) that I started doing a lot of writing just to pick up the slack financially. I found that I liked the writing a lot more than I liked the editing.

THE FF GO BEYOND! Solving the mystery of what happened to Gravity in Dwayne McDuffie's *Beyond!* limited series will be the first order of business for the Fantastic Four! (Cover to *Beyond! HC.*)

SPOTLIGHT: What sort of material did you work on in your early days?

DWAYNE: The first thing I wrote was a limited series called *Damage Control*, which I created. That's how I got in the door.

SPOTLIGHT: Oh, sure. That's become quite the cult favorite concept.

DWAYNE: It's been gone a long time, but I've noticed it popping up again lately. It popped up in *Civil War*, *Wolverine*, *She-Hulk*, and I understand it's going to appear in *Ant-Man* soon. It's cool to see all of those guys back.

SPOTLIGHT: How did you come up with the idea for *Damage Control?*

DWAYNE: I stole it from the old *Batman* TV show. There was an episode where Batman had to take a u-turn in the batmobile. This parachute pops out to slow him down, and then he drops the parachute and drives off. This van then drives up that says *BAT PARACHUTE PICKUP AND LAUNDRY SERVICE*. It cracked me up, and I was thinking about it years later, and I thought, "You know what? There would be an economy to having super heroes in the real world." I started thinking about what you'd need, and the first thing I thought was that you'd need insurance, and you'd need someone to put the buildings back together. Because they are always getting knocked down, but are backup by the next issue.

SPOTLIGHT: It predates a lot of the real-world basis a lot of comics use these days.

DWAYNE: It does sort of do that in a way. It's kind of weird legacy isn't it? The thing I do sort of like to take credit for with *Damage Control* is the idea of looking at super heroes from the point of view of the people who live in their world. *Damage Control* was not about the heroes, it was about the cast of characters who had to deal with super heroes, and I think that informs a lot of what's been going on for a while. The stuff now is a lot more sophisticated, but we took our shot.

Look for high adventure and high drama as Dwayne and penciller Paul Pelletier take Marvel's First Family to new heights in the monthly FANTASTIC FOUR series! Also, look for Dwayne's series BEYOND!, which contains story threads followed up in his FF series, available in oversized hardcover.

SPOTLIGHT COMMENTARY *ON* FANTASTIC FOUR

Beginning with *FF #544*, Paul Pelletier is poised to join the ranks of artists who have put their visual stamp on the *Fantastic Four*. Considering this pantheon includes the likes of Jack Kirby, John Buscema, John Byrne, George Perez, and Alan Davis, this is no small task! From the looks of things, Paul – fresh off a run drawing the dimension-hopping team book *Exiles* – is ready to take over as the action kicks into high gear. In the following art commentary, Paul takes us on a trip through a few of his favorite pages, and talks about what it's like to be the new penciller on the Fantastic Four!

SPOTLIGHT: Are we in the Watcher's "home?" It certainly is huge in scope; is that inspired by the grand scale in which Kirby and Lee worked?

PAUL: Yeah, I believe it's his "home" on the moon. I guess the main inspiration for its scale was *Uncanny X-Men #137*, during the *Death of Phoenix* story, where Wolverine accidentally entered the Watchers house. It was big enough and strange enough to scramble Wolvie's senses. But, it's also difficult not to be influenced by the work that Lee and Kirby did on their run on *FF*. I think you can see some of the Kirby influence in the architecture that I used for the interior.

SPOTLIGHT: When the Watcher first appeared way back when, he was awe-inspiring. Later, he became more of a plot device. The fact that the Watcher was there meant something important was going down, but he himself was treated like any other character. You and Dwayne look like you're trying to make him awe-inspiring again with that dramatic panel. Was that the plan?

PAUL: I think so. Dwayne makes a point to remind us that the Watcher was seen at both the wedding for Black Panther and Storm, and the funeral for Gravity, proving that they were both moments of importance. The Watcher is an iconic cosmic being in the Marvel cosmos, and his appearance at an occasion should never be trivial.

SPOTLIGHT: Do you find yourself using more large panels on *FF* than you usually do, to portray the sense of grand adventure?

PAUL: Not necessarily, because it all depends on what the story asks for. Sometimes it's tough to use huge panels if you also need to save room for 4-5 panels of dialogue on the same page. It's a tricky balancing act sometimes!

Fantastic Four #544, page 17

SPOTLIGHT: It looks like Black Panther is in the Reed Richards role there. Is it a challenge to portray his many facets – tech hound (a la Reed), noble king, husband, warrior – visually, especially with his mask?

PAUL: Well, fortunately for me, a lot of the story has Black Panther without his mask, so that helps with drawing his personality. His costume design is so simple and powerful that it's easy to portray him as a noble king/hero. He's a great character.

SPOTLIGHT: The middle panel looks almost like a direct homage to Kirby, with the Panther as a Reed surrogate, complete with KirbyTech. Are you having as much fun doing this as it looks? And how do you feel about the legacy of *FF* art and what your role as the current artist is?

PAUL: Oh yeah, it's incredibly fun stuff! It's also a little daunting when I think of the names that have worked on this book. It's an amazing legacy! I guess that I'll just do my best and hope that the fans enjoy these issues as much as I have enjoyed drawing them.

SPOTLIGHT: The blacked-out face of the Watcher, with his eyes glowing, certainly returns the character to a place of mystery. Was this in the script, or a technique you decided on?

PAUL: I think that it was just something I decided to do for exactly the reason you mentioned: To make him more mysterious and a little foreboding.

SPOTLIGHT: Do I detect a little John Byrne in that rendering of Johnny?

PAUL: That little shot of him? I guess Mr. Byrne's influence on my work still runs strong!

SPOTLIGHT: The last panel features the fabled Kirby Dots! Is that a prerequisite for any FF artist? "You must use Kirby Krackle!"

PAUL: I guess we use the Kirby Krackle in hopes to tap into Kirby Energy! More power, more dynamics, more kinetic creativity!! *(Sigh.)* I've got a long way to go.

Fantastic Four #544, page 18

Fantastic Four #544, page 19

SPOTLIGHT: What an incredible first panel! That doesn't look like it could have been very specifically described in the script. What did the script call for? How did you come up with what you drew?

PAUL: If I remember correctly, Dwayne wanted something that resembled the end of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, with headshots of our heroes incorporated within. They're supposed to be traversing the Watcher's intellectual matrix. I just tried to give Dwayne what he asked for. I hope that I was successful!

SPOTLIGHT: How closely did you work with colorist Paul Mounts on this page? I especially like the white light shining through Ben's mouth.

PAUL: Not at all, actually. I think Paul did a great job on it. It's pretty close to how I thought of it when I drew it.

SPOTLIGHT: Speaking of Ben, he's such an important part of the *FF*'s iconic look. What went into your approach to drawing him?

PAUL: I loved the way artists like John Byrne, Alan Davis and Carlos Pacheco handled the Thing (along with the likes of George Perez and others!), so I just wanted to try and capture that same feeling. I wanted to make him very expressive and also to accentuate his rocky exterior. He was the character that I was most excited about drawing when I was asked to draw *FF*.

SPOTLIGHT: You've obviously hopped on board the *FF* just as they are becoming adventurers again. That must be exciting.

PAUL: Definitely! I'm really happy to be a small part of the *FF* legacy!

THE MASTERWORKS!

A GALLERY OF THE GREATEST FANTASTIC FOUR ART!

JACK KIRBY'S

THE GALACTUS TRILOGY

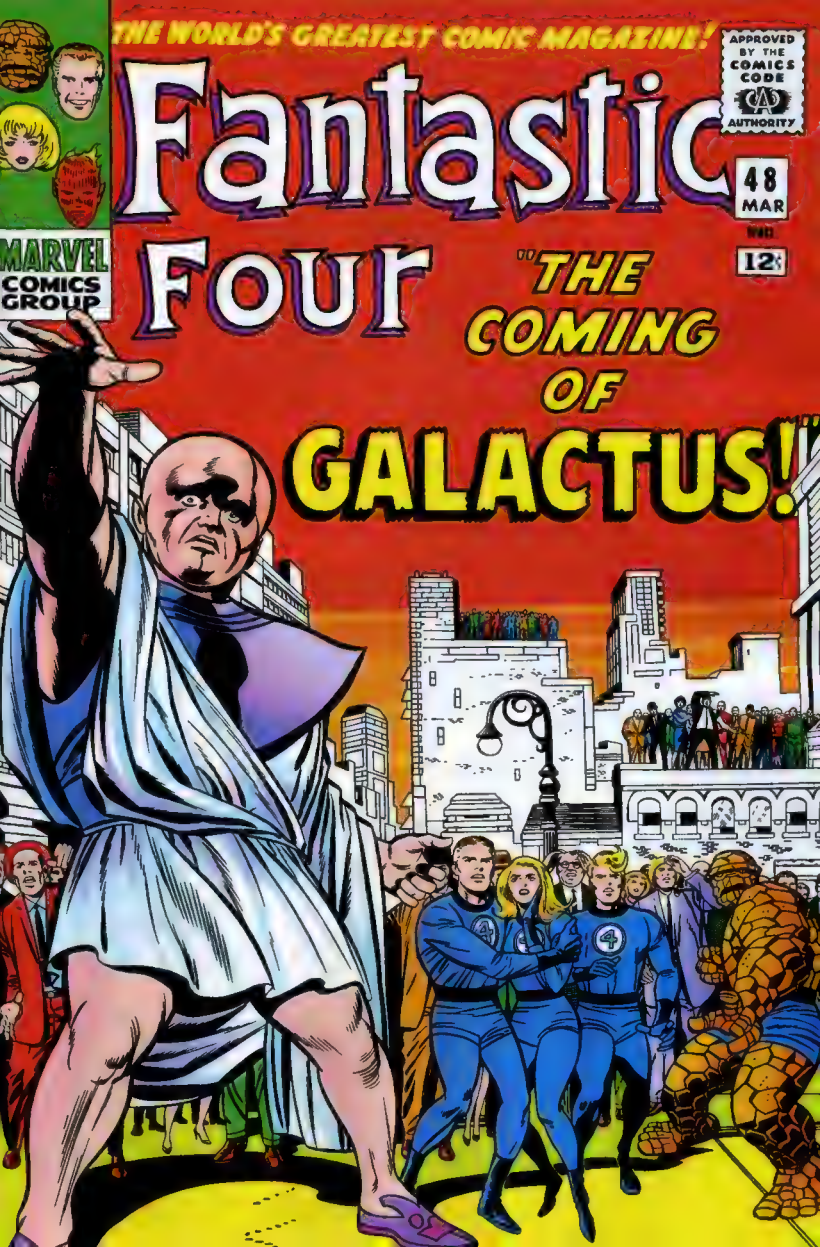
KIRBY ACOLYTE ERIK LARSEN WALKS SPOTLIGHT READERS THROUGH THE CLASSIC FF EPIC.

Coinciding with the coming of the second Fantastic Four movie is the second, massive volume in the *Fantastic Four Omnibus* series...so I guess good things for 4 come in 2! And these two items couldn't be more perfectly matched: The film's subtitle promises *The Rise of the Silver Surfer*, while among the 30+ issues of comics that *FF Omnibus Vol. 2* will reprint in remastered form is "The Galactus Trilogy," the original classic that introduced the Silver Surfer and his power cosmic to a stunned comics audience.

"The Galactus Trilogy," the name by which this story is now often referred, spanned three issues of FF continuity, from *Fantastic Four #48-50*, and featured the Fantastic Four against a menace more awe-inspiring than any they had faced before, or frankly, since! Ironically, though, not all three issues dealt with the coming of Galactus and his star-spanning herald! The first seven pages of *FF #48* provided the climax to the classic run of stories that introduced the Inhumans back in *FF #44* — and the last seven pages of *FF #50* set up subplots that would play out later in the series, and that were totally unrelated to the world-devouring god! But in between these two bookends is a timeless classic that is considered one of the centerpieces of comics history. With "The Galactus Trilogy," the Marvel Age of Comics had truly established its firm grip on its terrestrial "universe" and was declaring to its readers that it was ready to reach for the stars...or have the stars themselves reach for Earth!

To help us take a look back at this comics classic while looking forward to the crisp new reproduction in the forthcoming Omnibus, *Marvel Spotlight* reached out to fellow Kirby Kook Erik Larsen, a comic writer and artist who holds Jack Kirby as a creator who had perhaps the biggest influence on his outlook as a creator. Much of Erik's work on his long-running image title *Savage Dragon* is indebted in ways both large and small to Jack Kirby's influence, and it was his love for "The King" that led him to spearhead the tribute jam *Fantastic Four: The World's Greatest Comic Magazine*, a twelve-issue limited series published by Marvel in 2001 that drew talents like Bruce Timm, Joe Sinnott, Keith Giffen, Jeph Loeb, Kurt Busiek, and many more to celebrate the 40th Anniversary of Marvel's First Family.

Without further ado, let's join Erik as he carries us through the time and space of the Marvel Age of Comics at its most awesome...when Galactus first appeared in the red skies above our heads and the Fantastic Four were the only beings who could stand in his way!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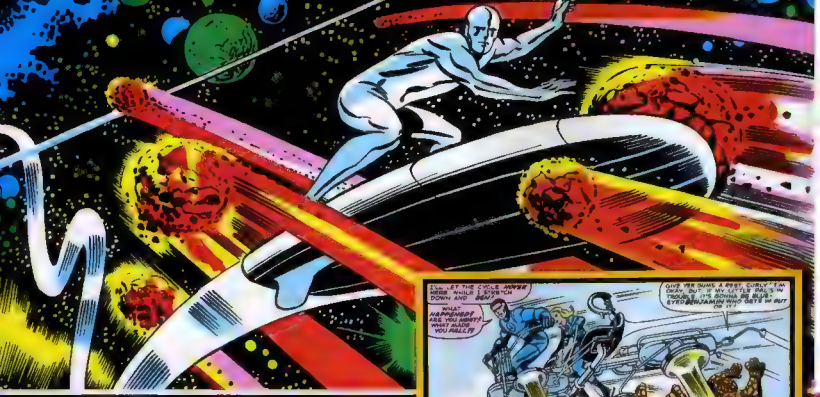
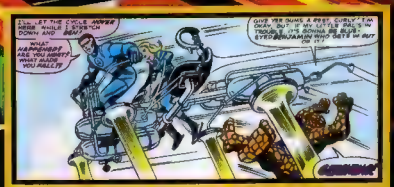


"THE 'MARVEL METHOD' THAT STAN LEE PIONEERED WAS A PLOT CONFERENCE

as opposed to a written script. Artists would talk through the story with Stan and take notes. Then they would draw the stories and fill the panel borders with plot points and suggested dialogue. Stan would script the books using their scribbled notes as a guide and more often than not, he'd depart wildly from what the artist had scribbled in the margins. Sometimes those collaborations yielded gems, other times chaos. Jack Kirby was a creative dynamo and he thought on his feet. Jack was big on improvising. Even when he wrote his own stuff, he might tell folks what he had in mind but when he sat down to actually draw the story, he'd do something else entirely."


LET THE CYCLE HOVER WHILE I STEP TO DOWN AND BEAT
GIVE 'EM SUMS A REST, CURLY! I'M OKAY, BUT IF WE LET'S'S RALLY'M TROUBLE IS GONNA BE BUSY EYED!

"IT WAS FAIRLY ROUTINE FOR JACK TO COBBLE TOGETHER SOME NEW AND NIFTY MODE OF TRANSPORTATION FOR THE FF.

That's Jack. You may note that this cycle made few appearances. It was easier for Jack to come up with a new vehicle than reference an old one."

"THIS IS A GREAT BIT THAT REALLY ILLUSTRATES JUST HOW STRONG THE THING IS.

A tough guy takes him on and is brought down with a resounding 'Plink' from the Thing's middle finger."

"OUR FIRST SOLID LOOK AT THE SURFER, WHO LOOKS REMOTE AND SOMEWHAT CREEPY AND THREATENING. HE'S CLEARLY AN ALIEN. THERE'S NO HINT OF WARMTH BEHIND THAT GAZE."

"JACK DID A COLLAGE LEADING UP TO THE BIG REVEAL of the world-devouring menace, but the effect that saw print wasn't as awesome as Jack had intended. Largely, I thought Jack's collages were failures. They looked out of place and the poor printing on chunky newsprint just failed to deliver the impact of what Jack had created. The actual collages are amazing pieces of work but reduced to gray and colored with the limited colors available, they just looked muddy. Often it was a real head-scratcher to even dope out what you were looking at. The positive effect was that it looked dark and ominous but speaking as a fan, I'd have rather have seen a drawing. The few times Jack's collages really worked were on covers — like the one for *Fantastic Four #33* with the FF and Subby and the ones at DC for *Jimmy Olsen* and *Forever People*."

"GALACTUS IS HERE AND HE'S WEARING CHRISTMAS COLORS!

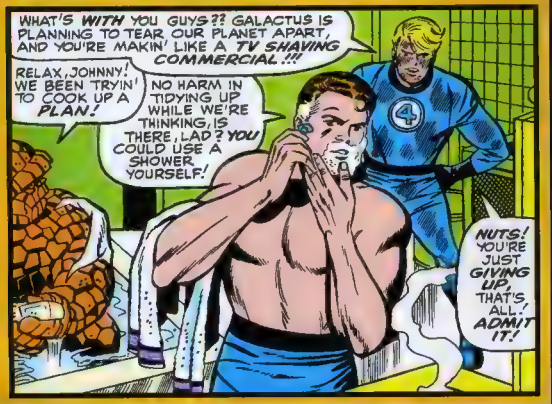
Clearly this color-scheme was not as awe-inspiring as they would have liked and it was changed in the following issue for that reason. However, it is an outstanding drawing and powerful design which transcends the coloring. Years later, when I introduced my own world-devouring villain in the pages of *Savage Dragon*, I had him colored red and green as an homage to Galactus' original colors. People seemed to question the likelihood of an alien being sporting a big, English, letter 'G' on his chest, but not question him speaking English. Go figure. I tend to be more pragmatic about it and look at these things as being representational rather than literal. To that end, it worked fine. (The 'G' was jettisoned for subsequent appearances, however.)

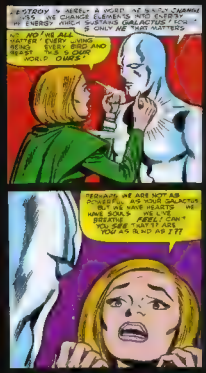
"A CLASSIC SPLASH PAGE, THE FF AGAPE. THE STORY NEEDED THAT TO GET ACROSS THE AWE THAT THESE CHARACTERS HAD. AT THE SAME TIME, HOWEVER, IT MADE THEM MORE OBSERVERS THAN PARTICIPANTS IN THE UNFOLDING DRAMA."

AND THEN- GALACTUS SPEAKS
SO! THUS YOU WHO CONSPIRED TO USE THE ENTRY WORLD FROM THE EYE OF GALACTUS TO GAIN ENTRY TO MY WORLD MAY THWART MY WILL!!
WHO ARE YOU, PLUNDERER OF THE PLANETS, THAT YOU SPEAK OF MATTER UPON WHICH NO MAN HAS EVER SET FOOT, AS IF IT MUST ADD DIRECTLY TO YOUR GLORY!!
OR MUST I WATCH HELPLESSLY AS YOU DEVOUR GALACTUS?
SEE HOW HE ABANDONS HIS ARROGANCE TO PLEAD FOR HIS LIFE!
COINCIDENCE.
AH, I RECALL! BUT IF YOU DO NOT ATTACK, THE ENTIRE PURPLE PEOPLE EATER!

"THEY DITCHED THE CHRISTMAS COLORS IN FAVOR OF NAKED LEGS. Again, this has been fixed in later appearances and often re-colored when the story was reprinted. But the bare legs give him something of a Roman appearance and that helps make him that much more foreign looking."

"REED SHAVES AND THE THING TAKES A BATH WHILE 'THINKING UP A PLAN' TO FACE GALACTUS. It's something of a goofy scene and you can't help but wonder if the team has only one bathroom, but it worked for me. The characters needed time to talk and it made for a visually interesting page. Touches like this helped make the FF more human than the more stiff and stoic characters from the competition. Readers could relate."

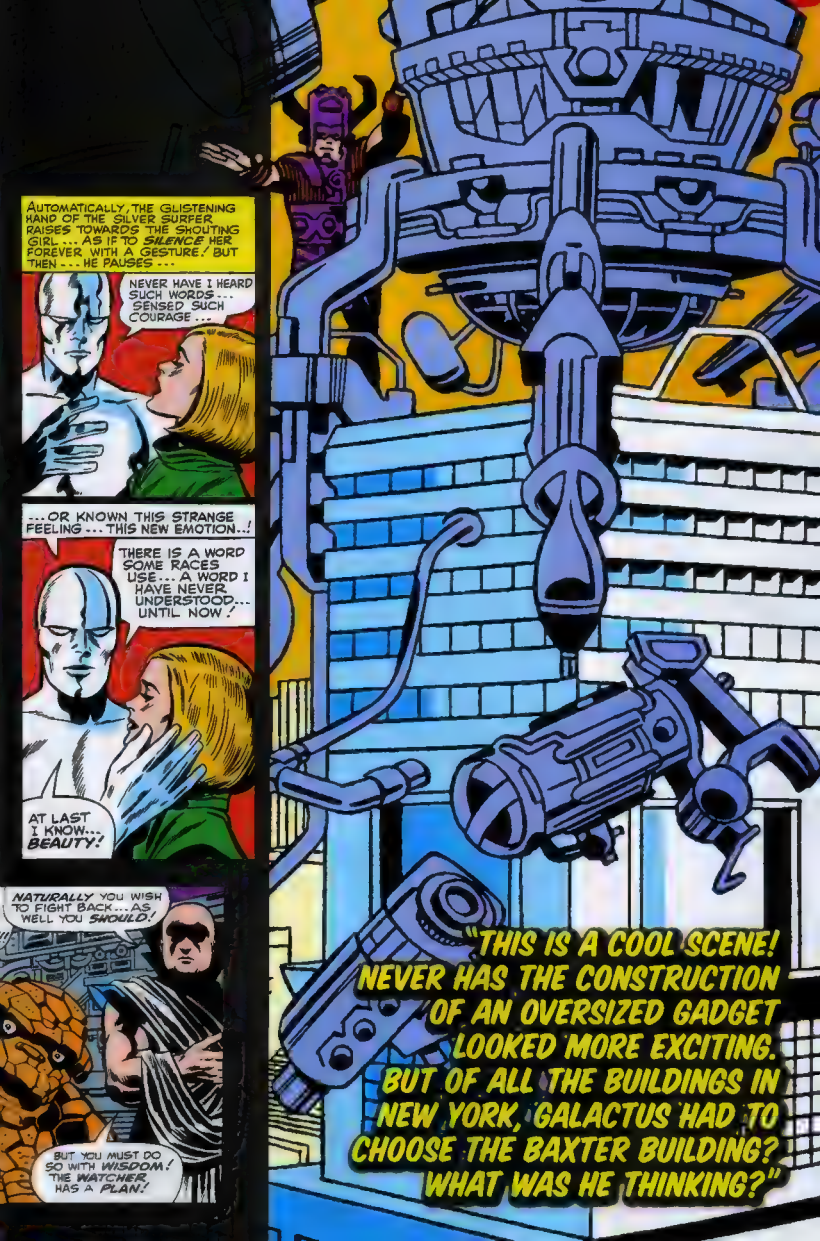

WHAT'S WITH YOU GUYS?? GALACTUS IS PLANNING TO TEAR OUR PLANET APART, AND YOU'RE MAKIN' LIKE A TV SHAVING COMMERCIAL !!!
RELAX, JOHNNY! WE BEEN TRYIN' TO COOK UP A PLAN!
NO HARM IN TIDYING UP WHILE WE'RE THINKING, IS THERE, LAD? YOU COULD USE A SHOWER YOURSELF!
NUTS! YOU'RE JUST GIVING UP, THAT'S ALL! ADMIT IT!

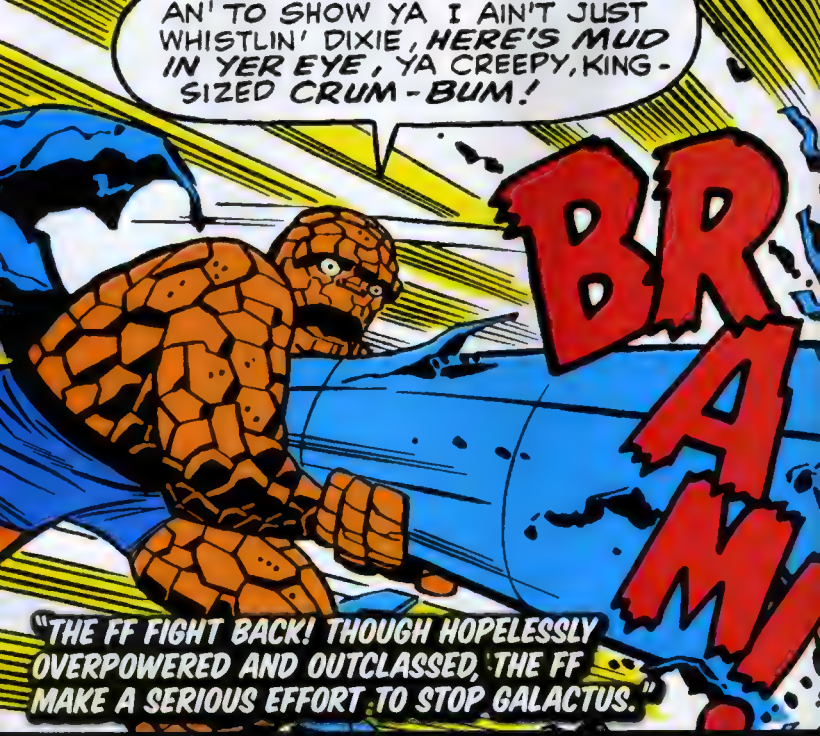


"THIS IS A FASCINATING SEQUENCE, with the very human qualities of Alicia eventually rubbing off on the stoic, inscrutable Surfer. Jack is in fine form here. You can really feel Alicia's panic and desperation. The Surfer seems quite alien here and it's clear that neither Lee nor Kirby had in mind what would become his origin at this time. The Surfer was simply an alien and quite possibly a construct of Galactus. I always thought Stan's Surfer line, 'At last I know...beauty!' was something of a non sequitur. Okay, Alicia's a dish — we all know that — but how do you get 'beauty' out of her rant?"

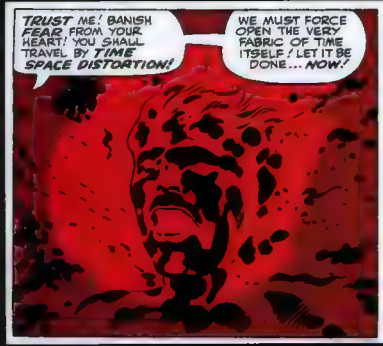
"THIS WAS A FAVORITE STORYTELLING METHOD FROM THE LEE/KIRBY DAYS, GIVING THE READERS A GLIMPSE OF WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN IF THE HEROES FAIL."

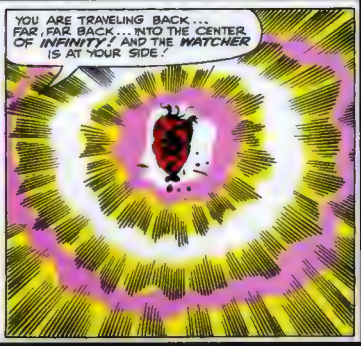
IT'S UNTHINKABLE! IT CAN'T HAPPEN! IT MUSTN'T HAPPEN! THERE MUST BE A WAY TO STOP HIM!
IT'S LIKE SOME MAD, INCONCEIVABLE NIGHT-MARE--- BUT, ONE FROM WHICH WE CAN NEVER AWAKE!
WHAT ARE WE WAITIN' FOR?? WE SURE AS HECK AIN'T GONNA TAKE THIS LYIN' DOWN!


AUTOMATICALLY, THE GLISTENING HAND OF THE SILVER SURFER RAISES TOWARDS THE SHOUTING GIRL... AS IF TO *SILENCE* HER FOREVER WITH A GESTURE! BUT THEN... HE PAUSES...
NEVER HAVE I HEARD SUCH WORDS... SENSED SUCH COURAGE...
...OR KNOWN THIS STRANGE FEELING... THIS NEW EMOTION..!
THERE IS A WORD SOME RACES USE... A WORD I HAVE NEVER UNDERSTOOD... UNTIL NOW!
AT LAST I KNOW... *BEAUTY!*
NATURALLY YOU WISH TO FIGHT BACK... AS WELL YOU *SHOULD!*
BUT YOU MUST DO SO WITH *WISDOM!* THE *WATCHER* HAS A *PLAN!*
"THIS IS A COOL SCENE! NEVER HAS THE CONSTRUCTION OF AN OVERSIZED GADGET LOOKED MORE EXCITING. BUT OF ALL THE BUILDINGS IN NEW YORK, GALACTUS HAD TO CHOOSE THE BAXTER BUILDING? WHAT WAS HE THINKING?"



"THE FF FIGHT BACK! THOUGH HOPELESSLY OVERPOWERED AND OUTCLASSED, THE FF MAKE A SERIOUS EFFORT TO STOP GALACTUS."


TRUST ME! BANISH FEAR FROM YOUR HEART! YOU SHALL TRAVEL BY TIME SPACE DISTORTION!
WE MUST FORCE OPEN THE VERY FABRIC OF TIME ITSELF! LET IT BE DONE... NOW!

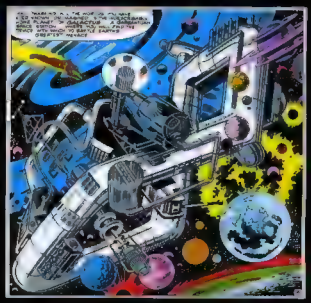


"THE WATCHER SENDS JOHNNY THROUGH 'TIME SPACE DISTORTION,' TO A GREAT EFFECT.

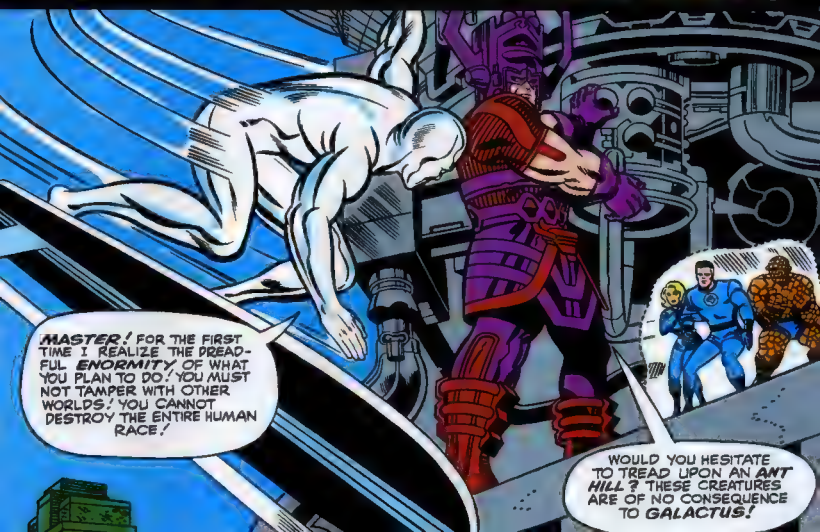
It's a pretty psychedelic scene. The red and yellow color knockout is particularly effective here. Very cool!"

"THE PUNISHER SQUARES OFF AGAINST THE FF.
He looks like an over-sized frog, but this diminutive lackey is a dynamo. When he gets going, there's no stopping him!"

"GALACTUS' HOME – A GIGANTIC SPACE STATION.
Subsequent artists would re-draw this ship line for line, not even bothering to shift the planets in their orbit around it. It's an impressive sight, to be sure!"



"ANOTHER CLASSIC SPLASH PAGE AS THE SILVER SURFER ARRIVES ON THE SCENE.
Although this is technically an issue of the *Fantastic Four*, it's really a Silver Surfer story. Ultimately, it's more his tale than theirs. Galactus, by this time, is sporting trousers. No chance of any upskirt shots circulating on the Internet following this ish!"


MASTER! FOR THE FIRST TIME I REALIZE THE DREADFUL ENORMITY OF WHAT YOU PLAN TO DO! YOU MUST NOT TAMPER WITH OTHER WORLDS! YOU CANNOT DESTROY THE ENTIRE HUMAN RACE!
WOULD YOU HESITATE TO TREAD UPON AN ANT HILL? THESE CREATURES ARE OF NO CONSEQUENCE TO GALACTUS!

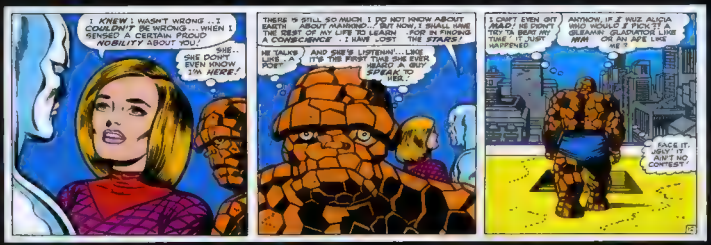
SINCE YOU SHALL BE HERALD TO GALACTUS NO LONGER, I REMOVE YOUR SPACE-TIME POWERS!
HENCEFORTH, THE SILVER SURFER SHALL ROAM THE GALAXIES NO MORE!

"GALACTUS STRIPS SURFER OF HIS 'SPACE-TIME POWERS' AND LEAVES HIM STRANDED ON EARTH. GALACTUS SEEMS MERCILESS AND COOLLY DETACHED."

"HE WAKE OF THE ETERNAL COSMOS... PUT IT DOWN! YOU'VE NO RIGHT TO USE SUCH POWERS!"
"TO HOLD TOGETHER A GALAXY... OR WHOLE UNIVERSE!!"
AND SHOULD THE UNIVERSE TROUBLE GALACTUS SURVIVE IT?

"REED BUSTS OUT THE ULTIMATE NULLIFIER.

The Watcher has cheated. By the rules of the Watchers, he's not supposed to do anything but observe, but he's clearly broken his vow in order to aid the FF. The Nullifier is a nifty-looking gadget."


I KNEW I WASN'T WRONG... I COULDN'T BE WRONG... WHEN I SENSED A CERTAIN PROUD NOBILITY ABOUT YOU!
SHE... SHE DON'T EVEN KNOW I'M HERE!
THERE'S STILL SO MUCH I DO NOT KNOW ABOUT EARTH ...ABOUT MANKIND... BUT NOW, I SHALL MAKE THE REST OF MY LIFE TO LEARN ...FOR IN FINDING A CONSCIENCE ... I HAVE LOST THE STARS!
HE TALKED) AND SHE'S LISTENING!...LIKE LIKE...A (IT'S THE FIRST TIME SHE EVER WANTED ANY BODY SPEAK TO HER.
I CAN'T EVEN GET MAD AT HIM! HE DON'T TRY TA BEAT ANY THING IT JUST HAPPENED
ANYHOW, IF I WUZ ALICIA AND WOULD F PICK A GLEAMIN' GLADIATOR LIKE HIM OR AN AFE LIKE ME ?
FACE IT, UBOY! IT AIN'T NO CONTEST

"JACK WAS ABLE TO MAKE A ROUGH, ROCKY GUY LIKE THE THING LOOK SAD AND DOE-EYED.

The interesting thing about the Thing was that he was, essentially, a cartoon character in a "real" world. His exaggerated features and mannerisms placed him outside the norm but the highly-rendered, rock-like exterior was the detail that helped sell him as being as real as the others. Strip away the detail and he's as cartoony as any of the cartoon sidekicks from comics in the 1940s. This is a touching scene. And it's a sequence that illustrates that even though the world may have been saved for another day, there's still time for small, human tragedies to bring a guy down. Years later, Alicia would be dating the Silver Surfer, but at the time this was unthinkable because the Surfer was clearly an alien being that knew nothing of Earthly ways. Here was a guy that absorbed energy and was anything but human. His later origin undid all that."

"GALACTUS CALLS IT A DRAW IN ANOTHER POWERFUL KIRBY DRAWING, CRACKLING WITH ENERGY. The limited colors here add a powerful punch to an already effective panel. There were limited colors available at the time and colorists had to choose wisely to make things work. Here was a case where the colorist opted to knock things out and the color choices made it work beautifully. And Kirby's crackling energy effect is in fine form as the years progressed. Jack would utilize this effect to represent everything from energy to water and numerous other artists picked up on it. Clearly it's an effect that works well."

HOW ABOUT THAT! ACCORDING TO THE BUGLE THE WHOLE THING WAS A PUBLICITY STUNT!
I'VE LEARNED THAT THE BEST THING TO DO IS READ J.JAMESON'S EDITORIALS & ASSUME BELIEVE EXACTLY THE OPPOSITE!
PUBLISHER CALLS GALACTUS HOAX

"THE MAN ON THE STREET AND NEWSPAPER HEADLINES BRING IT ALL BACK TO THE REAL WORLD.

Stan and Jack were extremely good at touching on the reactions of the common man to these superhuman happenings."

ULTIMATELY, WHILE THIS IS A GREAT STORY, IT'S NOT A GREAT SHOWCASE FOR THE FANTASTIC FOUR. The Watcher, the Silver Surfer and Galactus overshadow the heroes. It's an important tale nevertheless and it gets things in motion for the issues that follow."

FANTASTIC FOUR OMNIBUS VOL. 2 will hit Stores this June, and it will reprint Fantastic Four #31-60 and Annual #2-4 in an 800+ page, oversized hardcover. The artwork has been restored and recolored from the ground up, and the Galactus Trilogy and all the other classic tales inside will look better than ever before!

As for Erik, you can find his work in the pages of Savage Dragon, another legendary title that has now spanned well over 130 issues! He's also busy recoloring Jack's artwork for an upcoming trade that collects his Silver Star series from his early 80s indie days. And for a taste of Erik's work for Marvel, check out MARVEL COMICS PRESENTS WOLVERINE CLASSIC VOL. 2 TPB!

I DIDN'T BELIEVE IT POSSIBLE! I'LL INITIATE A SERIES OF RANDOM PHASE JUMPS AROUND THE PERIMETER OF THE TIME BUBBLE!
WE MUST LOSE HIM!
TIME AND SPACE LOSE ALL COHERENCE AS THE FANTASTIC FOUR AND THEIR ALLIES HURTLE ACROSS THE YEARS...

FROM THOR TO FOUR

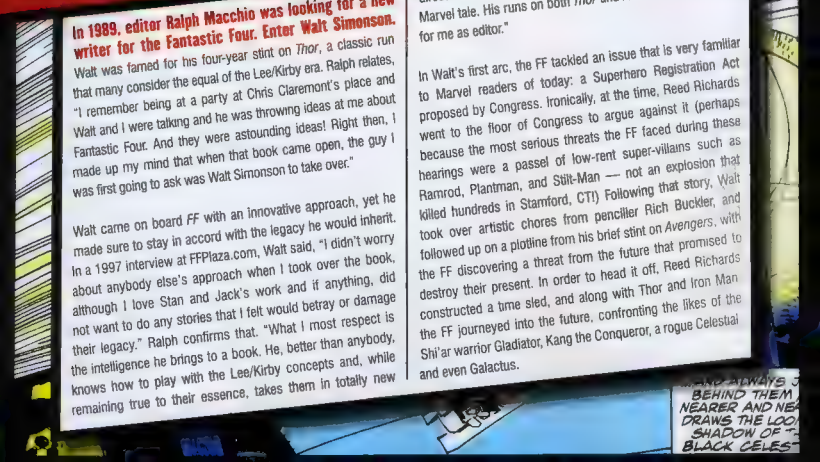
A LOOK BACK AT WALT SIMONSON'S FF

Marvel's upcoming trade paperback collection celebrates WALT SIMONSON's Visionary run on Fantastic Four. Here's why. BY MATT ADLER

In 1989, editor Ralph Macchio was looking for a new writer for the Fantastic Four. Enter Walt Simonson. Walt was famed for his four-year stint on *Thor*, a classic run that many consider the equal of the Lee/Kirby era. Ralph relates, "I remember being at a party at Chris Claremont's place and Walt and I were talking and he was throwing ideas at me about Fantastic Four. And they were astounding ideas! Right then, I made up my mind that when that book came open, the guy I was first going to ask was Walt Simonson to take over."

Walt came on board *FF* with an innovative approach, yet he made sure to stay in accord with the legacy he would inherit. In a 1997 interview at FFPlaza.com, Walt said, "I didn't worry about anybody else's approach when I took over the book, although I love Stan and Jack's work and if anything, did not want to do any stories that I felt would betray or damage their legacy." Ralph confirms that. "What I most respect is the intelligence he brings to a book. He, better than anybody, knows how to play with the Lee/Kirby concepts and, while remaining true to their essence, takes them in totally new directions. His artwork is stunning and he tells a heckuva Marvel tale. His runs on both *Thor* and *FF* are real high points for me as editor."

In Walt's first arc, the FF tackled an issue that is very familiar to Marvel readers of today: a Superhero Registration Act proposed by Congress. Ironically, at the time, Reed Richards went to the floor of Congress to argue against it (perhaps because the most serious threats the FF faced during these hearings were a passel of low-rent super-villains such as Ramrod, Plantman, and Stilt-Man — not an explosion that killed hundreds in Stamford, CT!) Following that story, Walt took over artistic chores from penciller Rich Buckler, and followed up on a plotline from his brief stint on *Avengers*, with the FF discovering a threat from the future that promised to destroy their present. In order to head it off, Reed Richards constructed a time sled, and along with Thor and Iron Man the FF journeyed into the future, confronting the likes of the Shi'ar warrior Gladiator, Kang the Conqueror, a rogue Celestial and even Galactus.



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Far from catching a break, in their journey back to their own time, the FF were knocked off course into an alternate timeline where Dan Quayle became President of the United States, Joseph Stalin kept himself alive and ruler of the Soviet Union through cybernetics, and the Cold War was about to turn hot with nuclear intensity. Despite their experience with mechanized dictators, preventing armageddon at the hands of one of history's most infamous tyrants would prove to be a challenge even for the Fantastic Four. In many ways, these out-there stories represented a return to the wild and innovative adventures that Lee and Kirby made a hallmark, marking Walt's run as truly Visionary among FF writers (and artists)!

Eventually, the FF did make it home, and then launched into what is one of their best remembered storylines. A renegade Skrull, on the run from her own people, manages to disable the team, and, posing as Sue Storm, convinces four of Marvel's most popular heroes — Spider-Man, Wolverine, Hulk, and Ghost Rider — that the Skrulls have killed the FF, thus setting the New Fantastic Four after her pursuers. Could Marvel's Most Popular succeed where Marvel's First Family failed? The showdown took them all the way to Monster Isle where they faced off against the Skrulls as well as the Mole Man and his hordes of hideous creatures. This arc was ably illustrated by the talented Art Adams.

"I never saw a need to rein Walt in. Just let him he'll blow you away every time." —Fantastic Four

It is also memorable for the tagline on issue #348, replacing the standard "World's Greatest Comic Magazine" with "World's Most Collectable Comic Magazine" poking fun at the arc's use of high profile guest stars. The tradition of altered taglines started on the first issue that Walt illustrated, *FF #337*. Editor Ralph Macchio explains, "I think initially I had the idea to mess with the tagline. I recall that with Walt's first issue, he was just so into it that we were running late, so I thought as a goof I'd run 'The World's Latest Comics Magazine' instead of 'Greatest.' It allowed us to poke fun at ourselves in a good-natured way. Thereafter, I recall Walt jumped into the fray and had some fun with the tagline, too, in subsequent issues."

FF #350 featured the return of the Fantastic Four's archenemy Doctor Doom, in a story that raised eyebrows even for its cool and capable editor. Ralph says, "I think the only time I had just a touch of trepidation was when Walt did that story in issue #350 that had Doom returning to Earth after an extended stay in space. It was a very spooky story that seemed to say we'd never really seen the real Doctor Doom. Again, I'm glad I let Walt take it his own way because it was a very strong piece of writing."

SUSAN! WHAT--?
HE WAS SO BIG! HE WAS THERE ALL THE TIME AND WE DIDN'T SEE HIM!
IT'S GALACTUS! AND THIS TIME HE'S DEVOURING THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE!
WE DON'T HAVE ENOUGH POWER TO COUNTERBALANCE THE GRAVITY WELL!
THE BLACK HOLE IS PULLING US IN!
NEXT WE DON'T WHAT TO SAY! W NOT EVEN SURE GOING TO BE PUB A NEXT ISSUE! I BE T.J. ALL-BU PAGES!

Fantastic Four
THE WORLD'S MOST COLLECTIBLE COMIC MAGAZINE!
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
FEATURING THE WORLD'S MOST EXPLOSIVE CAMEO!

go and
editor Ralph Macchio

In #352, Walt broke new ground again and developed a revolutionary non-sequential storytelling format, that had Reed Richards and Doctor Doom engaging in a one-on-one time-duel, where the story could be followed through use of the clocks that appear in each panel rather than simply reading them sequentially. In the 1997 interview, Walt related, "I feel that that fight was handled in a way that nobody in comics had done before. And you don't often get to do something in comics that hasn't been done before somehow. I'm proud of the way it came out."

In Walt's final arc on the series, the *Fantastic Four* were brought up on charges of disrupting the timestream by the inter-dimensional agency known as the Time Variance Authority. Brought to the TVA's headquarters, they met with one of the mid-level functionaries, Mr. Mobius, who looked suspiciously like Marvel editor Mark Gruenwald! The FF quickly realized the TVA was a bureaucratic nightmare, with the team being detained until the TVA could sort through the charges. Unfortunately, given the TVA's nature, this could take literally forever!

As Walt related in a 2005 posting at Comicbookresources.com, "The TVA was a satire of bureaucracy in general and of Marvel at that particular time and place as the company was moving towards a more corporate model. The point of the TVA is that it was an infinite organization and still expanding (a new desk and monitor for each new universe born out of every possible time bifurcation). The office environment was the perfect visual symbol for a bureaucracy as were all the faceless monitors."

Thanks to Mr. Fantastic's ingenuity, the FF were able to escape the clutches of this cosmic bureaucracy. They managed to delete all references to their timeline from the TVA's systems, leaving them unable to track their world or pursue the FF any further. With that, the FF hitched a ride on an inter-dimensional locomotive and returned home.

One might think an arc that pushed the envelope as much as this one would cause consternation in editorial, but Walt's skill inspired trust. Says Ralph, "I never saw a need to rein Walt in. Just let him go and he'll blow you away every time. Walt, in many ways, is his own best editor. He knows the Marvel Universe — its characters and concepts — and he knows just how far to stretch it before it'll break. His last storyline, for example, where he introduced the TVA: in lesser hands that story could've seemed foolish or silly. But Walt made it work brilliantly. You just bought into this whole concept of some supra-cosmic organization that archived all the events throughout every timeline — the ultimate cosmic bureaucracy. Great idea that needed a master's hand to make it come together."

The arc reflected some of the frustration Walt felt over the changing climate of Marvel at the time, so it is perhaps not surprising that it was his final one. In the 1997 interview, Walt explained, "I never had any problems with my editor and would be happy to work with Ralph again some day. However, after I had done the FF for a while, Marvel's overall editorial direction had begun to change and I felt that the company atmosphere was becoming less conducive to my producing good stories. So I left."

Still, even at 19 issues, Walt's FF run is one of the best remembered and because of this, his run has just begun being collected with the *Fantastic Four Visionaries: Walt Simonson Volume 1 TPB*, collecting *Fantastic Four #334-341*. Should this volume go over well with the buying public, a second volume would likely collect the rest of Walt's run.

A History of Kooky Quartets!

BY DUGAN TRODGLEN

It may seem strange that the Fantastic Four, a super-hero team held together by family bonds, now includes Black Panther and Storm, and, well... it is! But it's not unprecedented. Several times in their history, various members of the team have taken leave and been replaced by alternates. When writers from Stan Lee to Walt Simonson have wanted to shake things up, here's who they've recruited.

SHE-HULK may not have been the first, but she was certainly the most significant FF pinch hitter, as she had a lengthy tenure during John Byrne's legendary run on the title. She joined in *FF #265* when – after the events of Secret Wars – The Thing decided to stay behind on the Beyonder's "Battleworld." She-Hulk was a popular character and a good choice to fill the powerhouse role in the group. Byrne had an obvious affection for the character, later launching her in her second ongoing book, *The Sensational She-Hulk*.

CRYSTAL and **MEDUSA** were the first replacement members. Both are members of the Royal Family of the Inhumans, longtime allies to the FF. Crystal (also a love interest of Johnny's), with the ability to control the elements, joined in *FF #81* during Sue's first pregnancy, and again later when Reed and Sue both took a break from the team. Medusa, Queen of the Inhumans, and her exotic, psionically controlled hair, joined in *#132* when marital problems caused Sue's absence.

LUKE CAGE, POWER MAN, joined in *FF #168* when Ben Grimm was temporarily "cured" of being the Thing. True to Cage's "Hero For Hire" status, he was indeed hired by Reed for his services.

MS. MARVEL II. (Sharon Ventura), Ben's girlfriend, had gained super strength through the mysterious Power Broker, and joined the team in *FF #306* (when Crystal rejoined). Just a few issues later, she was mutated by radiation, looking like the Thing looked when he was first transformed. She later became known as She-Thing.

ANT-MAN II (Scott Lang) joined when Reed was apparently killed in *FF #381*. The team needed a resident scientific whiz and Scott ably filled in until it was revealed that Reed was, in fact, not dead.

[illegible] joined the team in Walt Simonson's *FF #374-375*, Johnny's Lyja, a female Skrull who had been impersonating Alicia Masters, falsely reported that she recruited a quarter of Marvel heavy hitters to form a new Fantastic Four to carry out her schemes. The team comprised of HULK, SPIDER-MAN, WOLVERINE and GHOST RIDER (Danny Ketch). They were later reunited by Dr. Strange for another go-round.

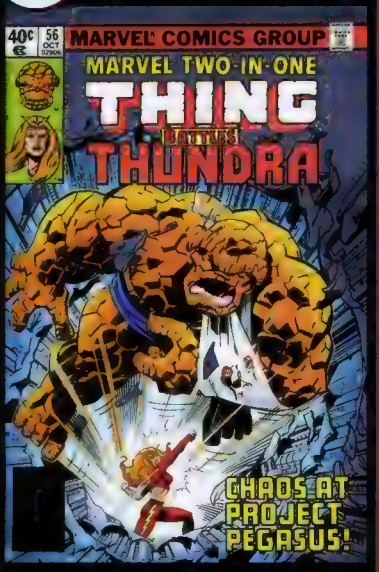
THE TOP 10 THING STORIES OF ALL TIME!

BY JEPH YORK

Spotlight takes note of Bashful Benjy's all-time best barnburners and count 'em down!

Benjamin J. Grimm is, without a doubt, the most prevalent member of the *Fantastic Four* to appear in *Marvel Comics*. In addition to appearing in the monthly *FF* book, he co-starred with the Human Torch in the latter half of Johnny's Strange Tales run, headlined in *Marvel Two-in-One* for a hundred issues, and starred in not one, but two solo *Thing* books! And that's not counting all the various limited series that have featured him as a star or co-star! "Bashful Benjy" has logged more feature-character face-time than any other member of the FF — and in honor of that accomplishment, *Spotlight* cracked open the vaults and did some research on Aunt Petunia's favorite nephew! We picked out ten stories we consider to be the best of the best, and we now proudly present the countdown to clobberin' time.

10 THE PROJECT PEGASUS SAGA!



From *Marvel Two-in-One #53-58* (1979)

part epic where the Thing was summoned to help out at Project Pegasus, a combination alternative-energy research centre and supervillain detention center. Also employed at Pegasus were Quasar and Goliath – although Goliath was there in his civilian identity of Dr. Bill Foster, searching for a cure to the deadly radiation poisoning from which he was suffering. As Ben discovered, one of the super-powered people under Pegasus' care was Wundarr, a childlike hero who, after an encounter with the Cosmic Cube, now absorbed any and all energy around him – including Ben's own strength.

[illegible] occurred – Deathlok, and Thundra and the Grapplers – in each case, sneaking into the facility not to steal something, or break out any of the prisoners, but to leave something behind! They were all employed by a mysterious benefactor to smuggle part of the machinery needed to create an Nth Projector – machinery gathered up by the traitorous scientist Dr. Lightner. As he began to assemble the device, Wundarr awoke, and strode directly towards the chamber housing the Cosmic Cube – his power-absorption abilities knocking out force fields throughout the complex, and inadvertently freeing several villains! The Thing, who had previously taken quite a beating at the hands of Deathlok and Thundra, teamed up with Quasar and Goliath to keep the villains from escaping – but they were outnumbered. As Klaw readied himself to blast them all, he suddenly dissipated – and Ben looked up to see his old friend Wundarr standing over [illegible]

[illegible] control over his energy-dampening powers, and a new hero, the Aquarian. But there was no time for explanations, for at that moment, Dr. Lightner activated the projector, and became the Nth Man – a living black hole, which began to suck in the entire Project Pegasus complex!

Everything the heroes threw at the Nth Man just made him stronger, until Aquarian suggested a human chain. Using Ben's strength to keep the chain together, Aquarian was able to enter the Nth Man's body without being lost in the void, and he extended his energy-dampening field outwards until he finally disrupted the villain. The Project Pegasus base was saved and the Nth Projector was destroyed – but, though a gloating figure watching from afar [illegible] it was only a minor setback. For the Roxxon Corporation was confident they would soon be rid of all who stood in their way, and gain a world monopoly on energy production...

[illegible] part saga spans fantastic Thing battle sequences by John Byrne and George Perez – and is also notable for being the first appearance of longtime Thunderbolts member Songbird, in her original female-wrestler incarnation of Screaming Mimi!

[illegible]

9 BEN'S COLLEGE DAYS

From *The Thing #2* (1983)

[illegible] issue, written by Ann[illegible] Byrne, [illegible] the gaps in Ben Grimm's college-era backstory, and reunited him with an old flame. In this issue, the Thing received a letter from Alyinn Chambers, a famous actress and one of the world's most beautiful women – and Ben's one-time college girlfriend! The letter said that she'd like to see him again, soon – and Ben, nervous, began to think back to their prior relationship. He and Reed used to double-date with Alyinn and another girl, Nan Freeman – but a few weeks into a very promising relationship, Alyinn broke up with Ben without explaining why. Frustrated, Ben blew an important football game, and Reed tried to counsel him – suggesting that if she affected Ben that much, he owed it to her to tell her how he felt.

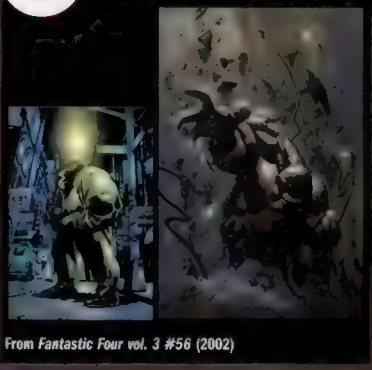
A few weeks later, Ben caught up with Alyinn, confessed his feelings – and proposed. But unfortunately, Alyinn refused – crying, she explained that she wanted a life as an actress, and loved Ben too much to put him in a position where she'd have to constantly neglect him for her career. She left again, and told Ben not to follow. Utterly dejected, he threw the ring into a lake.

Back in the present day, Ben was nervous about seeing her again after so long; how would she react to his monstrous appearance? But as she entered the room, it was Ben who reacted – Alyinn was walking with a crutch, and from the droop of her face it was obvious that she'd had a stroke. She had managed to relearn simple tasks, she said, but this was a life-changing experience... and Ben was the only person she knew who had been through anything remotely similar. She wanted to see him again to ask how he had coped with becoming the Thing.

After a long night of talking, the two came away happy. They hadn't reconnected romantically – far too many years had passed for that – but they had rekindled a long-dormant friendship, and managed to help each other cope with their altered life circumstances a little bit better in the process.

Collected in the *Fantastic Four Visionaries: John Byrne Vol. 3. TPB*.

8 BEN'S RELIGION REVEALED



From *Fantastic Four vol. 3 #56* (2002)

Usually, fill-in issues are forgettable, treading water until the next creative team arrives, featuring meaningless punch-ups and villains that never appear again. Not so with this issue! Although writer Karl Kesel was indeed killing time until Mark Waid's debut, that would come two issues later, he chose to make something special out of his time on the title. In this issue, Ben ventures down Yancy Street in a brooding mood and came across Al Sheckerburg, the owner of a pawn shop that Ben used to steal from when he was a boy in the Yancy Street Gang. A local group of thugs was extorting money from Sheckerburg, and he assumed that it was the Yancy Streeters – and that the Thing had shown up as their muscleman. Of course, it wasn't true, but that didn't stop Ben from thinking back to his misspent youth running with the Yancy Street Gang, or how his older brother Daniel, also a Yancy Streeter, was killed in a gang war.

Eventually, the two showed up at the gang leader stomping ground – Sheckerburg was revealed – a second-rate villain with exploding powers called Powderkeg. The Thing defeated him, with a little help from the modern-day Yancy Street Gang, but Sheckerburg had been badly injured, and the Thing believed him dead. Offering a prayer over the old man's body, readers were treated to a never-before-revealed detail of Ben Grimm's history: that he's Jewish!

[illegible] Sheckerburg [illegible] and [illegible] from the past, he and Ben reconciled – Ben apologizing for his actions as a youth, and Sheckerburg telling him that he understood why young Ben felt he had no choice but to run with the gang. The issue ended with Ben having gained deeper community ties to his old stomping grounds... and with the readers having gained deeper insight into Ben's character, background and motivations. Not bad for a fill-in issue.

Collected in *The Fantastic Four: [illegible]* and the second *Fantastic Four HC*

6 THE WAR AT HOME!

From *Marvel Fanfare #15* (1984)

Johnny Storm has tormented Ben with pranks for years, from simple hotfoots to elaborate practical jokes. At one point he even claimed responsibility for most of the joke packages the Yancy Street Gang had sent Ben over the years. Ben invariably responds the same way – chasing Johnny through the Baxter Building, threatening him with grievous bodily harm, the torch laughing and shooting fireballs back at his outraged friend. It's a love/hate relationship that has lasted over forty years – and nowhere is that relationship more clearly delineated than in this classic story written and drawn by industry legend Barry Windsor-Smith.

[illegible] attending to several odd tasks. The next morning, Ben woke up and stumbled off to the bathroom – realizing too late that his boots were tied around his legs. In a groggy stupor, he ripped them off – and, looking in the mirror, was surprised to see beard stubble! Upon closer inspection, they turned out to be sections of plastic straws that had been glued to his face – and Ben began to suspect what was going on. Heading downstairs, he avoided a pair of roller-skates sitting in the middle of the hallway, and spied Johnny's pancakes sitting on the kitchen table. He decided to eat them – but, unfortunately, they were spring-loaded, and pancakes and syrup splattered all over him just as Johnny flew by the kitchen door. In a rage, Ben tore after the Torch, only to trip on a skateboard and several toy cars – and careen down the hall into the waiting arms of Dr. Doom! Ripping straight through, Ben realized that it was just a poster – but that didn't stop him from hitting two more posters, of the Super-Skrull and HERBIE, and landing in an enormous pile of balloons. From the computer monitors came Johnny's laughing face, shouting, "April Fool!" However, Ben had the last laugh, pointing out that April Fool's Day was tomorrow. Johnny, realizing his mistake, sulked off.

[illegible] Ben rewired [illegible] system, redirecting the plumbing for the top five floors into Johnny's ceiling vent, and arming it with a sound-activated trigger, and sat back to enjoy the festivities. Pleased with himself, he reached for [illegible]

Collected in the *Best of the Fantastic Four* HC

7 GIVING BACK TO THE COMMUNITY

From *The Thing vol. 2 #5-6* (2006)

[illegible] was short, Slott produced some of the most memorable Thing adventures in recent memory, combining humor, pathos, adventure – and most of all, fun! This two-parter, a sequel to *Fantastic Four 3.3 #56*, is a prime example. Ben, who had recently come into immense wealth when he gained control of his quarter of the FF's financial portfolio, [illegible] to subsidize a promise he made to Mr. Sheckerberg to help out in the pawn shop until he had worked off the items he stole as a kid, by writing him a check – but the old man ripped it up, preferring to see Ben keep his word. So, Ben grudgingly showed up at the pawnshop every Sunday, and watched as Yancy Street residents traded their worldly possessions for cash. Ben suggested that he just give the needy customers some of his own newfound money, but Sheckerburg wisely pointed out that they'd prefer to have their pride than accept a handout. Thinking back to his own youth as a member of the Yancy Street Gang, where pride was all they had, Ben understood – and finally realized [illegible]

[illegible] Unfortunately, [illegible] during his construction planning, and the families responded by taking out a hit. They sent the Sandman and the Trapster to attack the Thing as he was manually demolishing the old buildings on his construction site, and as the three fought, Spider-Man swung by in his shiny new "Iron Spider" costume, and an old-fashioned Marvel team-up occurred. In the end, the villains were defeated, Sandman was turned into a statue by being mixed with the Trapster's paste, and the Thing paid Spider-Man twenty dollars to morph his costume back to his "classic" look. Weeks later, after calling in a favor from Damage Control, the Grimm Youth Center – named for Ben's brother Daniel – opened on time. And that Sunday, Mr. Sheckerburg announced that Ben had finally worked off his debt to the pawnshop. As Ben, dog-tired, sat and waited for the bus, he nodded off – and the Yancy Street Gang, showing their appreciation for all he had done for their community over the last few weeks, covered him in graffiti.

5 THE THING BATTLES THE HULK

THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!
Fantastic Four HULK THING
THE BANSHEE BATTLE CONTINUES
THAT'S IT, CHARLIE - COME 'TA POPPA
TIME TO BIGGER HULK'S STRONGER

From *Fantastic Four* #112 (1971)

The Thing and the Hulk have clashed dozens of times over the years – but never as brutally, as painfully as this issue. In personality accidentally altered by one of Reed's experiments, Ben had gone bad and was tearing up the city, determined to get back at the world for every imagined wrong over the years. Reed, determined to cure him, summoned Bruce Banner to the Baxter Building to consult with him – but the taxi that Banner was in drove past the Thing's rampage, and the shock turned Banner into the Hulk – who leapt out of the cab and attacked! Their battle raged across Central Park, with the remorseless Thing and the fighting-mad Hulk pulling no punches – smashing fists, trees, and even statues into each other. As reporters broadcasted the blow-by-blow, the fight spilled into the streets, and the two hate-filled behemoths began to tear up city blocks, fighting savagely to destroy one another. Reed and Johnny worked tirelessly to create a device that would turn Ben back to normal – hoping that bringing him to his senses would stop the fight. But, as fate would have it, the battle came to a decisive end in a different manner. Alicia Masters, having heard the news broadcasts, rushed to the site of the battle. Calling out, she distracted the Thing just long enough for the Hulk to land a thunderous blow to his head – snapping his neck back and knocking him unconscious. Reed and Johnny arrived on the scene with their device – but it was too late. The Hulk had turned back into Bruce Banner and slunk off – and Ben was flat on his back, barely alive. Yes, folks, this was the most hate-filled, brutal Hulk/Thing battle ever, and the only one to make this list – and Ben lost.

4 FACE OF A MONSTER, SOUL OF A POET

From *Marvel Fanfare* #46 (1989)

[illegible] both just before and just after the fateful flight that transformed him into the Thing. It opens during Ben's time as a test pilot for the Air Force, and introduces the girl he was head-over-heels in love with at the time – Dr. Linda McGill. They had only been seeing each other a short time, but Ben was convinced that she was "the one." They spent all their free time together – dinner, dancing, you name it. Ben had never been so happy. One day, by chance, they happened to attend a state fair, and Ben commented on the sideshow freaks. He asked how Linda would feel about him if he looked like one of them, and she responded that she was more interested in the man inside. That night, Ben turned in early. He had an important flight the next day, into [illegible] with his friend Reed Richards.

[illegible] but [illegible] one. The [illegible] who returned – hidden under a trenchcoat and hat, but still monstrous enough to send his neighbors running screaming. That night, Linda showed up, having heard about the rocket crash and as she turned on the apartment lights, she got her first good look at the newly minted Thing. He reached out to her, telling her not to be afraid...but she ran. Ben lashed out in grief and rage, destroying his apartment, and then headed for the nearest bridge – debating whether or not he should jump.

[illegible] recovered and followed him, apologized, and asked if they could still work things out. True to her words at the sideshow, she truly did care for the man inside – but the Thing, crushed by his new appearance, didn't want what he perceived as pity. He yelled at her, smashed a portion of the bridge, and threw her out of his life. As the issue ends, Ben's voiceover reveals that Linda went on to marry and have children with someone else – but he always thinks back on her with profound gratitude. If not for her tenderness that night on the bridge, he might not have found the willpower to go on...

3 THE THING VS. THE CHAMPION — IN THE RING

I'M READY!
MAYBE I AIN'T THE STRONGEST OR THE TOUGHEST JOE THE CHAMPION HAS EVER FOUGHT -- BUT I AIN'T GONNA GO DOWN EASY!
HE'S GONNA KNOW HE'S BEEN IN A FIGHT -- A BONE-CRUSHIN' BRAWL LIKE NEVER BEFORE!

From *Marvel Two-In-One Annual* #7 (1982)

The Champion had come to earth. The Elder of the Universe who was the epitome of physical competition, the Champion had accosted earth's strongest heroes, even challenged them to a boxing match – with one blow of his hand or stroke. One by one, the Champion whittled down his opponents – the Sub-Mariner and Doc Samson were disqualified, the Hulk was thrown out for ignoring the rules, heroes like Sasquatch and Colossus were mercilessly pummeled and tossed aside – until all that was left was the Thing. The match began, Ben soaking up the Champion's merciless punishment and giving back as much as he could. He managed to last a round – something no one else had ever accomplished. Two more rounds followed, the Thing being hit harder than ever before, but absolutely refusing to stay on the canvas. Time and again he was smashed down, and time and again he rose inexorably to his feet. And the end of the third round, the referee declared the fight over – any more punishment would surely kill Ben. The Champion began to accept his trophy, but a beaten and bloodied Thing called out to him – telling the Champion that the ref may have awarded him the match, but he had yet to actually defeat Ben. The Champion turned slowly, and nodded his head. He could break Ben's bones, smash him into waste – but he could never, ever conquer his fighting spirit. The Champion spared Earth and [illegible] – and Ben, undefeated, passed out.

2 ONE-ON-ONE AGAINST DOCTOR DOOM

THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
Fantastic Four
40 JULY
MARVEL COMICS GROUP 12¢
DOCTOR DOOM
MORE DIABOLICAL, MORE DEADLY THAN EVER BEFORE!
"THE BATTLE OF THE BAXTER BUILDING!"
DON'T MISS THE THING'S EPIC HAND-TO-HAND FIGHT WITH DESPERATE DR. DOOM!

From *Fantastic Four* #40 (1965)

Doctor Doom couldn't have picked a better time to attack. The Fantastic Four had recently lost their powers in a nuclear blast, and it was child's play for Doom to take over their headquarters, hunting the FF down and attacking them with Mr. Fantastic's own inventions! With Daredevil's help, Reed finally managed to reach the Stimulator, a Skrull device that could return their powers. Even though regaining his human form was Ben's dream come true, and staying that way was his fiercest desire, he knew that the Thing's strength was all that could defeat Doom. And, regrettably, Reed turned the Stimulator on him. In a blinding flash of light, the Thing was reborn — and now! Smashing through Reed's control room, Ben came face-to-face with the FF's arch-foe, and attacked! Doom threw everything in his arsenal against him — massive electric jolts, an onslaught of expanding boulders, even a gravity device that pinned the Thing to the floor — but against all odds, under hundreds of times his own weight, Ben slowly stood. Advancing on Doom, shrugging off every assault, the Thing finally reached his foe, grabbed his gauntlets, and crushed them — crushing Doom's hands inside them as well! Defeated, Doom fled, leaving the Thing victorious — but grieving inside for his humanity, lost once again to save his friend. With dozens of giant-sized, power-packed panels, this is possibly the greatest Thing sequence ever drawn by Jack Kirby.

Collected in *Marvel Masterworks: Fantastic Four Vol. 4*, *Essential Fantastic Four Vol. 2*, and the [illegible]

1 THIS MAN... THIS MONSTER!

From Fantastic Four #51 (1966)

[illegible] greatest thing [illegible] someone else as the Thing! An unnamed scientist, consumed with jealousy of Reed Richards and resenting him as a costumed glory-hound, lured the Thing to his apartment. Drugging him, the scientist used a duplication machine to transform Ben back into human form — and himself into Ben's exact double! The impostor insinuated himself into the FF so completely that, days later, when the human Ben showed up to confront the phony Thing, Reed and Sue sided with the impostor. Frustrated, Ben stormed out.

[illegible] Reed assisted the impostor's [illegible] experiment: journeying for the first time into the Negative Zone, Reed needed an anchor, and only the Thing was strong enough to pull him back to our universe if something went wrong. For the impostor, this was a perfect opportunity — all he had to do was let go of the rope, and his greatest rival would be lost forever! But the time he had spent in the FF had an effect on him. The friendship he had experienced, the risky experiments he had watched Reed undertake, the heroism involved in trying to find ways to protect and advance all mankind with no thought to his own safety: the impostor was a changed man.

As Reed, being drawn towards a positive-matter zone that would mean his instant annihilation, tugged on the rope for help, the Thing impostor stood lost in thought — unsure if he really wanted revenge after all. Suddenly, the rope snapped — and the impostor came to his senses. Diving after the rope, he too was pulled into the Negative Zone — and when he reached Reed, he picked him up and hurled him back towards the portal, floating inexorably toward his death, the impostor was happy — because he had finally learned what it meant to have a friend.

[illegible] Ben Grimm, [illegible] from knocking on Alicia Masters' door, suddenly transformed back into the Thing. He raced back to the Baxter Building, thoughts of his once-again-lost humanity replaced by a desire for revenge against the impostor — but arrived to see Reed and Sue mourning him. Shocked and relieved to see Ben alive, Reed realized that the man who died was an impostor after all — but that, whatever his original motives, some of Ben Grimm's goodness, his [illegible] his basic humanity, had obviously rubbed off on him. He may have lived as a bitter, revenge-driven shell of a man — but he died a hero.

Collected in Marvel Masterworks: Fantastic Four Vol. 6, Essential Fantastic Four Vol. 3, and the upcoming Fantastic Four Omnibus Vol. 2.

Special thanks to the Board of Directors of the Marvel Chronology Project, and Sean Kleefeld of FFPlaza.com, for their input and assistance compiling this list.

SILVER SURFER: REQUIEM

ESAD RIBIC PREVIEW GALLERY

May will see the unveiling of J. Michael Straczynski's epic limited series starring the Silver Surfer, which features the stunning painted art of Esad Ribic! The following four pages includes preview highlights of SILVER SURFER: REQUIEM!

Esad Ribic's painted art from *Silver Surfer: Requiem* #3, page 24

Cover art to *Silver Surfer: Requiem #3.*

Silver Surfer: Requiem #3, page 18.

Silver Surfer: Requiem #3, page 5.

FIRST FAMILY, LAST STORY

WITNESS THE END(S) OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR!

BY DUGAN TRODGLEN

"CLOBBERIN' TIME GETS OLD: Even at an advanced age, The Thing is always ready for a scrap! (Image from *FF: The End #1*.

It is with great sadness

that we must inform fans to prepare themselves for *The Last Fantastic Four Story*, for 2007 marks *The End* of the FF! But before the crying begins — and we reach "the end" of this issue of *Marvel Spotlight* — let's take a closer look at what this all means!

Several years ago, Marvel started a line of special stories called "The End," in which top creators imagined what the final adventures of our Marvel favorites would be like. Some of these stories have been fashioned in one-shots, some in limited series, including "The End" projects about Wolverine, The Punisher, and others. One of the first such titles to be discussed was *Fantastic Four: The End*, to be written by Stan Lee himself and drawn by the modern heir to the power of Jack Kirby, John Romita, Jr. Well, it turns out both Stan and John are busy guys, and it has taken years since the initial discussions began, but the one-shot is (nearly) ready to go!

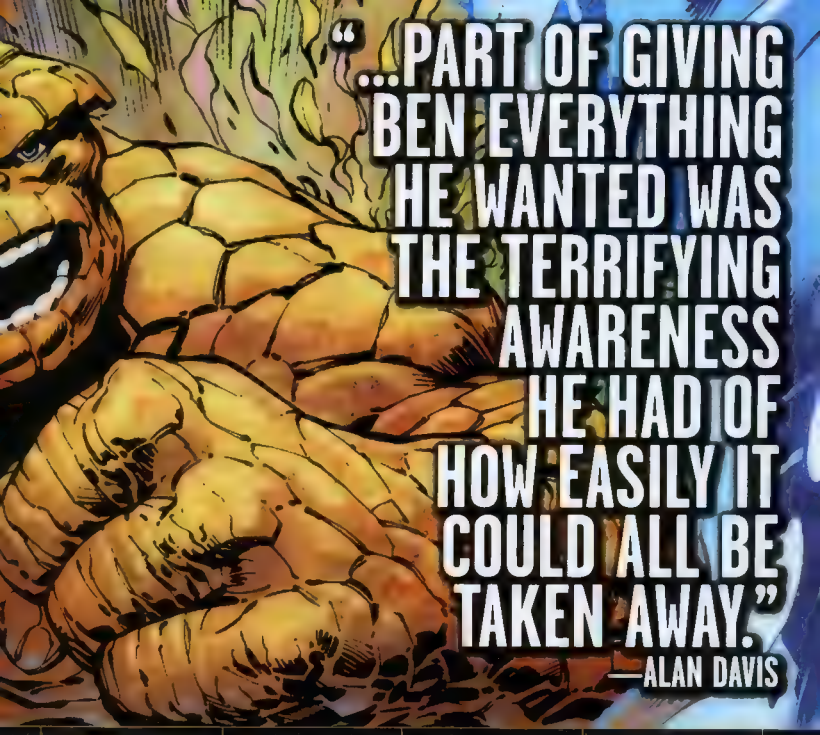
And before you can say "Who else but Stan could possibly write *FF: The End*?" we're gonna tell you! In the time it took Stan's book to happen (and honestly, who knew if it would actually come together), editor Tom Brevoort approached then-newly Marvel-exclusive artist/writer (and legend) Alan Davis about trying his hand at such a story. The result is the recently concluded, and soon to be collected, *Fantastic Four: The End*, a six-issue series written and drawn by Mr. Davis, proving once and for all that two "Ends" are better than one. *Spotlight* spoke with both Stan and Alan to try to figure out which "End" is which.

THE END WITH ALAN DAVIS

U.K.-based superstar creator Alan Davis has worked in comics for over 25 years, and for that long he has been considered one of the greats. He began in the early '80s, contributing to Marvel U.K. and helping bring Captain Britain to life with Alan Moore. Since then, he has contributed, as artist, writer, or both, to Fantastic Four, The Avengers, the X-Men, and a hoard of British-based characters such as Excalibur and his own creation Clan-Destine (a title he is returning to soon!).

In 2006, after signing an exclusive creator agreement with Marvel, Alan began work on *Fantastic Four: The End*, and the result is a dazzlingly beautiful six-issue series with a fast-moving tale spanning the Marvel Universe, as befits a story of this nature. With longtime inker Mark Farmer, it's fair to say that Alan Davis, after 25-plus years, is producing the strongest work of his career since returning to Marvel.

Dugan Trodglen asked him about his version of the FF's final adventure.


"...PART OF GIVING BEN EVERYTHING HE WANTED WAS THE TERRIFYING AWARENESS HE HAD OF HOW EASILY IT COULD ALL BE TAKEN AWAY."
—ALAN DAVIS

SPOTLIGHT: Thanks for talking to *Spotlight*, Alan. How did you discover the Fantastic Four over there across the pond in the UK?

ALAN: I'm old enough to have seen the FF when they first appeared. Odd issues of the original U.S. comics made their way to my hometown in England; then later the comics were reprinted in black and white in a British publication called *Fantastic*, I think, with a sister title *Terrific*.

SPOTLIGHT: How did you come to work on *Fantastic Four: The End*? Did you pitch the idea or did Marvel approach you? And were you always planning on writing it as well as drawing?

ALAN: Tom Brevoort offered the title to me as something I may like to write and pencil. I didn't need to think for too long before accepting. An opportunity to work on the FF outside of continuity was a dream come true.

SPOTLIGHT: Was there a sense of responsibility that goes into something called *Fantastic Four: The End*?

ALAN: Yes. Most definitely. The absolute best creators in the business have contributed to the FF, so the bar is set very high.

SPOTLIGHT: When the story opened (aside from the flashback to the battle with Doom), the team was very fractured. What went into that decision and how did you come up with each member's situation?

ALAN: When I start a story I have a lot of random ideas so I rationalize a beginning and, more importantly an end, to form a definite through-line to structure a solid continuity. "THE END" designation usually implies the death or decline of a character or group, but I always felt the FF were icons of optimism.

Starting the story with the group in a fractured state served a number of purposes. Each character had their own story-arc, which allowed each of them to introduce another facet of the future world they inhabited. Later, their coming together highlighted that bond that made the FF such a unique group.

Each member's situation was simply a logical extension of what the character had always been and what they desired. Reed a workaholic inventor, Johnny an adventurer (but as a man having earned the respect of the Avengers), Ben the family man settled with the love of his life and Sue, unusually adventurous — and leaner — perhaps, because she was driven to bring the family together against all odds.

SPOTLIGHT: Even though they were apart, and somewhat estranged, both Reed and Sue continued to wear Fantastic Four uniforms. Was this to show us

that neither had fully let go of each other, or the team?

ALAN: Some relationships explode apart with anger and intense emotions while others just disintegrate through apathetic indifference. Reed and Sue hadn't broken up. They just weren't together.

Obviously everyone wants to see the characters in their costumes, but I rationalized that Johnny had become independent and sought a degree of individuality. Reed was simply using the standard FF overalls. Likewise, Sue had taken the FF sub and diving suit. Neither would have given their attire too much thought. They were both focused on the job at hand: Reed to forget his loss, Sue to regain what she had lost.

SPOTLIGHT: Ben Grimm was living on Mars, married to Alicia (with kids) and able to change back and forth from The Thing. Was it rewarding to be able to give Ben a happy future that we all feel he's earned?

ALAN: Yes, but part of giving Ben everything he wanted was the terrifying awareness he had of how easily it could all be taken away.

SPOTLIGHT: The opening flashback scene was some clever misdirection. It appeared that not only was Dr. Doom out of the picture right away, but that Franklin and Valeria had been lost (a very dark way to start things!). What made you go in this direction (leaving Doom out of most of the story and having the children's apparent death hang a cloud over the family)?

ALAN: Obviously darkness and tragedy is dramatic, but Franklin and Valeria had to be included in the story in some simple and

practical manner. In a story set decades into the future they would have to be adults so the Fantastic Four would be the Fantastic Six. That just felt wrong. I wanted to do THE original Fantastic Four.

Incidentally, although Doom appears to be disposed of quickly, he has a far larger role in the story compared to any of the other villains or Namor. I hadn't originally plotted it that way but as I honed the story Doom was the only character whose page count increased.

SPOTLIGHT: As with Doom, you resisted the urge to have a story revolving around Galactus. Instead you saved him for a big moment in issue #6. Was it difficult to hold off playing that card until the end?

ALAN: No. Galactus is a very tough character to use well. Fortunately I got my Galactus story out of my system in Excalibur #61 so didn't have any major urge to focus on Galactus. Having said that, I thought the two appearances of Galactus were enough. He's a god of few words and when he speaks, the universe quakes.

SPOTLIGHT: What was your favorite character or concept to redesign for the future?

ALAN: I don't think I really designed anything too much. One of the things that allowed me to focus on the FF in a future universe is that *Star Trek*, *Star Wars* and all of the other Sci-fi films and TV have made the future concepts into familiar household concepts. And of course, Reed was creating ever more futuristic devices throughout the history of the FF so, as I used as a premise in the story, Reed wasn't any more futuristic than he had ever been, he had just shared his technology with the rest of the world.

SPOTLIGHT: It seems like you covered all the bases of the FF's world. Were there any characters you left out that you had wanted to fit in the story, or any you wish had a bigger role?

ALAN: I don't think I left anyone out but there were places I would have liked a few extra pages. Keeping to 22 pages for an issue is sometimes tough. It's easy to pad or stretch a 19 or 20-page story, but a 23-page story means you have to trim something you care about.

SPOTLIGHT: The story of the Fantastic Four is the story of the Marvel Universe as an expansive whole, but it's also the story of a close-knit family. *Fantastic Four: The End* is a great example. How did you approach this dichotomy?

ALAN: I followed the example of Stan Lee and Jack Kirby.

SPOTLIGHT: Based on your dynamic, energetic work on *Fantastic Four: The End*, you appear to have lost none of your enthusiasm for drawing comics. Does writing them as well help you stay excited about what you draw?

ALAN: I love storytelling. If I have a good story its easy to be enthusiastic.

SPOTLIGHT: Your story had a different interpretation of "The End" as a concept, with Valeria speaking of "The end of crises and danger — so we can just be a family now," rather than the death or destruction you mentioned wanting to avoid. You also ended the series with a terrific scene involving Doom that seemed to set up an awesome story. Why did you decide conclude a "The End" story with, essentially, a new beginning? And is this something you'd like to follow up on?

ALAN: I gave this quite a bit of thought. To give a satisfactory ending that allowed the FF to anticipate a trouble free future, all of their opponents had to be removed. Many of the FF foes were small-time, like the Mole Man, Mad Thinker and Diablo; others like Galactus are forces of nature — not 'evil.' The real threats were always Doom, the Super-Skrull and Annihilus. Putting Doom into the Negative Zone to destroy Annihilus had the benefit of not killing Doom but, in a perverse way, giving Doom what he wanted — total anarchy.

I also liked the idea of acknowledging the way many comics used to feature a complete 20 page story with the last two pages being a cliffhanger into the next issue. So although I didn't really think about a sequel, after finishing the last page I did think following it up would be a lot of fun.

It remains to be seen if that ever happens, but for now, if you want fun, you can turn to Alan Davis' FANTASTIC FOUR: THE END, which is full of high adventure and gorgeous super hero art. The series is now available in Marvel Premiere Edition HC. Thanks, Alan, for a great series and a great interview.

FINISHING THE FF: John Romita, Jr.'s art is the living *END*, man! (Original b&w pencils from Lee/Romita, Jr.'s upcoming *The Last Fantastic Four Story*.)

STAN LEE'S THE LAST FANTASTIC FOUR STORY

LOVED THE *FIRST* FF STORY? WAIT'LL YOU READ THE *LAST* ONE!

Last year, *Marvel Spotlight* had the honor of dedicating an issue to two titans who laid the foundation for much the Marvel Universe: Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. In that issue, we talked to Stan about the origins of the Fantastic Four. We didn't want to cover the same ground in this FF issue, but we had to talk to Stan, right? Well, how about if we talk to him about *The End* of the team? Spotlight got Stan's thoughts on writing about the "final fate of the FF" in a tale once called *FF: The End*, but now given its own singular title, *THE LAST FANTASTIC FOUR STORY!*

SPOTLIGHT: It's great to talk again, Stan. Thanks for taking the time. What is the format of your *The Last Fantastic Four Story*, due for release this August?

STAN: It's a single issue. I think it must be 45 pages.

SPOTLIGHT: And the artist is none other than John Romita, Jr.!

STAN: Couldn't ask for a better artist. His art is breathtaking. They called me and said, "Remember that book you discussed with John Romita, Jr. five years ago? About the end of the FF?" I said no. I had forgotten all about it! "Well," they said, "John finally finished penciling it and it's time for you to write it." I couldn't not do it!

SPOTLIGHT: When you were writing the FF back in the '60s and early '70s, did you ever give any thought to what their last adventure might be?

STAN: Never. I never wanted it to end.

SPOTLIGHT: Well, this is a good way of doing it without it actually having to end.

STAN: Right.

SPOTLIGHT: When you were approached by Marvel to write the last FF story, what did you think?

STAN: I said yes. (*Laughter.*) I'm a great interviewee don't you think? You'll notice I give you a lot of good stuff!

I was thrilled that they would ask me. I thought it sounded like a fun challenge. How in the hell am I going to write a story in which it's the end of

the FF? But I of course handled the chore magnificently. Have you read it yet?

SPOTLIGHT: No. I haven't had the opportunity yet.

STAN: Boy, are you in for a treat!

SPOTLIGHT: Good! I can't wait. So, Stan, the work you've done for Marvel recently, such as the *Stan Lee Meets* event and the backup story in *FF #543*, have been very much comedy stories...

STAN: I'm glad you realized that. I have a feeling a lot of people didn't know and thought I'd gone crazy!

SPOTLIGHT: Do you take that bent with this story?

STAN: No, no, this is very serious. This is back to the older days. Those funny ones I did because they wanted me to do new little versions of the characters. I didn't want to write the same old stuff so at least if I were to make them funny it would be different. It would be something new. I don't know if anybody bothered to buy them, but at least I enjoyed them.

FF: THE BEGINNING: Stan Lee and Jack Kirby were the writer/artist team for the first 102 issues of FF!

SPOTLIGHT: Well, we here at the *Spotlight* enjoyed them a great deal — especially the Dr. Strange story.

STAN: Wasn't that clever? I loved that.

SPOTLIGHT: And I think Alan Davis was inspired to work with you and did some of the best work I've ever seen him do.

STAN: The art was magnificent.

SPOTLIGHT: Well, we don't want to give away too much, but what can you tell us about *The Last Fantastic Four Story*?

STAN: Well, we have a villain who's bigger and more powerful than Galactus. We have a little bit of a mystery. This villain is somebody that cannot be defeated in any way. It's impossible to beat him. But the FF find a way to beat him. The only way to beat this villain is in a way that nobody would have expected.

The big thing was I had to find a reason why this would be the end of the FF. So at the end of the story Reed says, "It's time to retire. We've done it all. We'd just be repeating ourselves." They want to start having a normal life, and off they go, with what I think is a very dramatic last line (Which I'm not gonna tell you!)

SPOTLIGHT: Are there any other classic FF characters beside the main team who show up?

STAN: All of 'em! Let's see, as far as I remember we have the Silver Surfer, Galactus, Sub Mariner, Iron Man, Daredevil, Spider-Man, Thor. We have 'em all. I figured, "What the hell, I got 48 pages!"

SPOTLIGHT: And Dr. Doom, I take it?

STAN: Oh, Dr. Doom is big.

SPOTLIGHT: Well, we sure look forward to this, project, Stan.

STAN: It's a fun idea. I don't know if they're doing this with anyone else. Maybe they've had other writers do it for the other characters.

SPOTLIGHT: Yes, they certainly have. Chris Claremont wrote *X-Men: The End*, for instance.

STAN: The end of the X-Men? Oh, I'm angry they didn't give me the first one! Again. I'm an also-ran! Was it 48 pages?

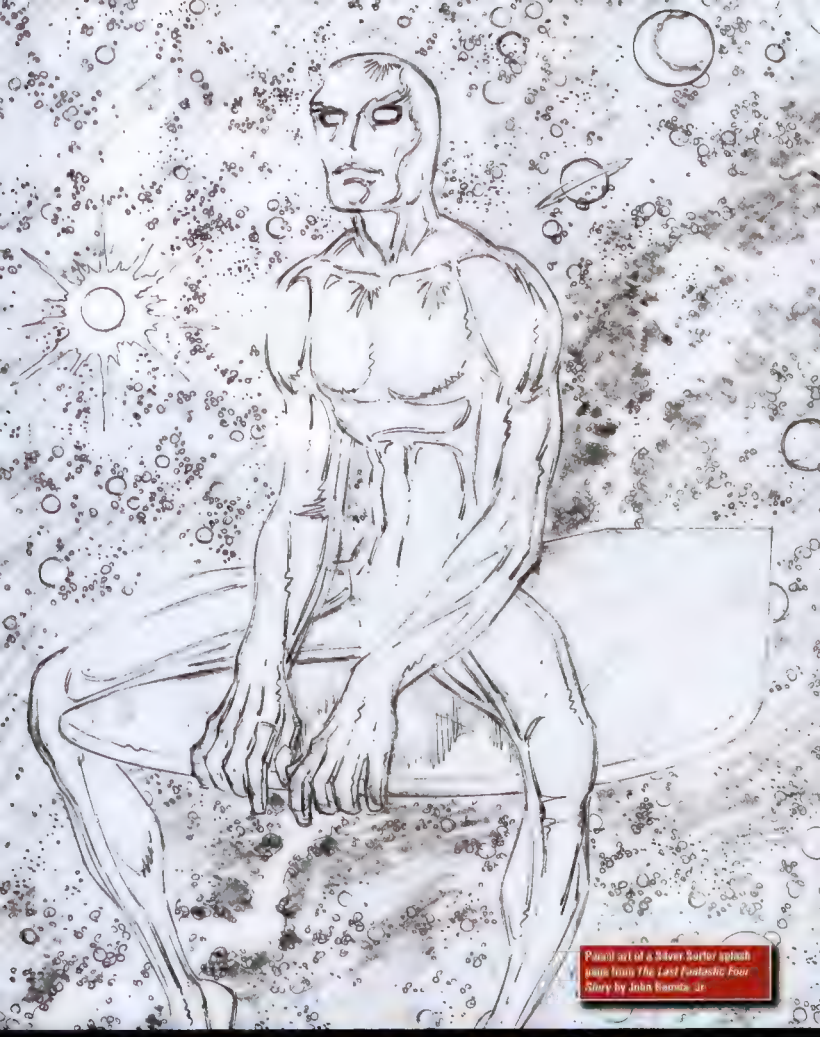
SPOTLIGHT: Well, Stan, I have to tell you, *X-Men: The End* was actually 18 issues long.

STAN: It was what?

SPOTLIGHT: It was 18 issues!

STAN: (*Laughter.*) And they gave me one lousy book!

Lousy? I doubt that! In any case, look for Stan Lee and John Romita, Jr's THE LAST FANTASTIC FOUR STORY, *due to hit stores in August!*



Pencil art of a Silver Surfer splash page from *The Last Fantastic Four Story* by John Romita Jr.

STAN LEE'S THE LAST FANTASTIC FOUR STORY

JOHN ROMITA JR.'S PENCIL GALLERY

The FF take on their greatest foe in this page of pencil art from JRJR!

Sub-Mariner is on the scene to assist the FF in their darkest hour in *The Last Fantastic Four Story*, due in August!

MARVEL SPOTLIGHT

CAPTAIN AMERICA REMEMBERED

LOOKING BACK AT THE LEGEND OF STEVE ROGERS

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